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MESSIAH

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MESSIAH.

BY

WILLIAM M. WILLETT,

AUTHOR OF "LIFE AND TIMES OF HEROD THE GREAT," "HEROD ANTIPAS,"
"NEW LIFE OF SUMMERFIELD," "CHRISTIAN ALLEGORIES," ETC.,
LATE PRESIDENT OF NEWBURY BIBLICAL INSTITUTE (NOW
BOSTON UNIVERSITY), AND PROFESSOR OF HEBREW
AND BIBLICAL LITERATURE.

"Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and *are sure*, that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the Living God."—ST. JOHN.

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DEDICATION.

THIS WORK IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED TO

ANNA W. CLEMENT,

of Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, on account of old friendship, and because the writer knows of none who treads more nearly in the footsteps of her divine Lord and Master, or who is more dead to human praise.

In a spirit of entire self renunciation she gave her all—to the last penny—which she had earned with the labor of her own hands, to found Bethesda, a home for homeless children, now in operation at Chestnut Hill. After struggling for the space of some fourteen years through almost insurmountable difficulties, through "evil report and good report," her faith never wavering—trusting in God for aid which was not withheld, though as in the case of a similar institution founded by Professor Franek, of Germany, they were sometimes brought in a strait place, the Home is now placed on a permanent basis, though it depends for its daily life as heretofore on the voluntary gifts of its friends.

This permanency is due to the large liberality and spontaneous kindness of a resident of Chestnut Hill,* a lawyer, a gentleman of wealth and high position, and a member of the Presbyterian church. Unsolicited, looking for no notice from the outward world, from his love purely of what was good, this gentleman has built and partly furnished a large, handsome building with ample outgrounds, for the Institution, which we trust will be long continued in the spirit and after the manner of its foundress when both she and her great benefactor shall be sleeping in the dust, and that many of these dear homeless ones shall arise to call them blessed.

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* H. J. W., Esq.

W. M. Willett.

Bergen, N. J.,
June 12, 1874.

P. S.—The last report of "Bethesda's Children's Christian Home" is just published, is deeply interesting, and represents the Institution as highly flourishing, though in the future as in the past, evermore depending on the voluntary contributions of its friends and patrons.

W. M. W.

PREFACE.

THE greatest theme ever presented to man is the subject of this book. This is the reason why it takes so deep a hold of the understanding and the heart. It is one thing to soar with Milton into the highest realms of poetic fiction (for what is PARADISE LOST but a fiction—a parody on the Word of God) and quite another, with a less vivid imagination, and a faculty by no means inventive, to speak of TRUTH as it is; and to follow it as delineated in the BOOK OF TRUTH.

I need not designate the theme. It is that of the coming, or first advent of the Jewish Messiah to our world. All the events of our world are as nothing to this; all that history unfolds pales before the splendor of this event. This gives to the Jewish nation a place in our world superior to that of any or all the kingdoms of the world combined. These do but revolve around it, and minister to its greatness, and reflect its luster—as the planets in their turn revolve around the sun.

In the history of the past, we find that the four great universal empires, both in their rise and fall, were all more or less dependent upon the Jewish nation; and were subordinated by God in bringing to pass those results which were essential to the introduction of Christ into the world. With all their wide celebrity, and vast influence for the time upon human affairs—they were so to speak, but as the fly on the wheel, so far as the ultimate destiny of mankind was concerned. They have all passed away; but they are not missed; they served their turn—answered their purpose in connection with the rulings of the Almighty, and are gone, leaving scarce a trace behind. But the Jewish people, existing no longer as a nation, as the depositary of the greatest of all trusts—the people through whom the Messiah should come, and to whom the "lively oracles" were committed, are exerting to-day, really through Christ, a greater influence on the world than ever before; and this influence will go on steadily increasing—as a great river, enlarging and deepening, to the end of time.

This then is our theme—the Jewish Messiah. Can any wonder at the interest we feel in it, or at the wish we have to speak of it worthily, and to present it in a form that will command notice and deserve respect? For years we have pondered on it; we have feared to touch a theme so sacred, so awe-inspiring, so full of immortal hope to man. Like Moses, we "put off our shoes" as we approach it, for we know full well that we stand on holy ground.

If any think that this is in any way a work of supererogation—that there is no call to review the testimony concerning Christ, to recite what the Scripture says of him—as if all the facts were so well established in our minds as not to be reviewed or gainsaid—we differ from them.

This is a subject, like that of the Scriptures themselves, ever beginning and never ending; ever attaining wider meaning—clearer developments—newer proofs; an inexhaustible theme. We seem to take it for granted that because we have been familiar from infancy with the gospel narrative, and have imbibed a belief of its truth, there is no need of going over and over again the sacred ground. But it is one thing to read the holy story, to be attracted by the charm of the narrative, to venerate the Name by which we are called, and quite another to fix in our minds such a sense of the PERSONALITY of Christ as to make him as real to us as if we had seen, and known and loved him on the earth. On such a faith as this no shadow falls, and it is as operative as it is perfect. This was the grand design of Jesus while upon earth: to impress upon his disciples his true kinship with them: his divine brotherhood as the Messiah was the end of his various miracles wrought in their presence from the first miracle in Cana of Galilee to the last of which we have record. Forever their faith was wavering, and forever it needed, like that of the Jews in the wilderness, to be re-established. However srong their conviction might be at one moment, the next it faltered. So difficult is it even in sincere minds to remove all doubt of the absolute reality of anything so marvelous as the actual appearance of the Great God among the children of men.

What the disciples learned imperfectly even under the teaching of Christ (prior to the advent of the Holy Ghost), is presented to us as a study of the deepest moment; and we mistake if we suppose we can learn it well and perfectly by any other method than that which Jesus took with his disciples, which was a review of the testimony of the Jewish Scriptures, and this with the aid and guidance of the Holy Spirit. This was the strength and glory of the Apostolic age; and just in proportion as the Church of Christ apprehends Christ—reduces his personality to a demonstration, and makes his existence on the earth a reality—having a personal consciousness thereof, the same as if it had known him in the flesh, the greater will be its strength, and the nearer will it approach in spirit and in fact to the first century of the Christian era. We cannot surpass the age of the apostles; but it is in the power of the Church of our day, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and by a belief in Christ similar to theirs, strong, firm, undeviating, to reproduce that age, and to give to the world a spectacle as glorious as theirs.

It will, we think, be thus seen that we have a great object in this work; a greater no man can have. All that is vast in nature, heroic in action, elevated in conception, must fail before the greatest of all exhibitions and manifestations, that of God in the flesh! Nor angels, nor men have seen but one such spectacle as this. Let us adore that we are permitted to gaze at this sight, not at a distance; but we are invited, like Moses, to draw near and see this wonderful exhibition of the love of God to man.

We are free to say we expect this work to be received. We grow bold in such a cause as this. Why should we not? Why should we fear? Apostles and prophets have grown bold under a similar inspiration. It is God's cause. Will he not defend his own? Is it not time to speak? Not from any vain impulse—not from any foolish fancy. Man recedes—the work of his hand is as nought when God appears. Man is little—he is nothing, he is nowhere, but God is everywhere. What is man but a reed shaken in the wind; of no account; a creature of yesterday, shrinking into nothing? Yet may he be bold for God, strong in his strength, not flinching from a declaration of the truth as it is in Jesus from any cause. On this stage, on this wide theater, none but God is seen—seated on his throne, glorious in majesty, while his effulgence fills his holy temple. Let the curtain rise on the august scene.

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MESSIAH.

PREAMBLE.

THE scenes we are about to describe took place in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, successor to Cæsar Augustus—dating from the fifteenth year of his reign—the same year that Augustus admitted him into joint partnership with himself, thereby fixing the successorship of the Roman empire after his death, an event which soon after occurred. Some three years afterward, Augustus dying, Tiberius Cæsar became sole ruler of the empire : an event important in itself, but made transcendently so by what transpired in one of its smallest and most insignificant provinces, that of Judea, bordering on the Mediterranean sea, its western shore forever washed by the surging wave. Of all lands none is so extraordinary as this, with whatever eye a proud and supercilious Roman may have looked upon it, though some of its physical peculiarities have not escaped the notice of a Pliny; and even Tacitus did not altogether disdain to notice its existence, while rating it lower than the lowest outlying territory of the barbarians. What, indeed, was not considered barbarous outside of the limits of the Roman empire? But of all countries, whether within or outside of the jurisdiction of imperial Rome, what land, nation or country was held in such supreme contempt by Tacitus, amounting even to a feeling of personal aversion on the part of the historian, as this Judean province.

Yet was it God's chosen theater. From the earliest period it had been so. Its early annals were the sweetest and purest of all the earth. Here had been found simple truth, almost a stranger on the face of the earth. Here were seen traces of the footsteps of Him who walked the earth in disguise, leaving behind mementoes of his presence, as a guide through a labyrinth otherwise dark and inextricable.

Never was there such an interesting land, though comparatively shut out from intercourse with all the rest of the earth. In process of time, too, it had a government, before which paled that of Athens and Sparta, based on the grand principle of making its entire administration subservient to the equal rights of all. Where was property so equally divided, land so justly proportioned, and a provision introduced to repair the inequality invariably arising from the present mixed condition of things? After a certain period every thing reverted to its original condition, and all set out anew. Surely in no other government was there ever such a just provision as this. Even the improvident were not uncompassionated, however little they might seem to deserve pity; while the unfortunate were never left wholly without hope that time would bring with it a sure recompense. Here, also, were no false gods; no worship derogatory to the Creator, though embellished with the highest charm of poesy—none unworthy of the highest reason of man. Poetry here had the noblest field for its fullest exercise: and nobly did it fulfill its mission. Its strains were worthy of him who inspired them, and alike exalted to their supremest dignity, God, the great Creator, and his creature, noblest of his works, reasoning man.

This is the land we propose to retread, visiting it anew. The interest deepens as we advance—as in a vast amphitheater when the spectacle opens—instead of a less imposing sight, as witnessed in the past, there will be unfolded scenes infinitely beyond what the boldest imagination ever dared to conceive, much less actually to picture forth to the astonished vision. Everything else fades before this. Whatever of brightness or grandeur the world has seen is as nothing to this. Invention is at fault, and reality surpasses all that poet ever imagined in the highest flight of his most daring and venturesome career.

BOOK FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

OPENING SCENES OF THE GREAT DRAMA.

FAMILIAR as are the facts to which we now advert, the opening scenes we essay to describe, we cannot entirely pass them by. They are too closely connected with what follows to be wholly omitted, even at the risk, at the outset, of not gaining as we would wish the attention of the reader. If what we are writing was a fiction, a mere fancy sketch, it would be different, but as it relates to the "grandeur of a God," nay, as it speaks of the great God himself, of his drawing the curtain aside that hides the invisible from our view to speak to man with a voice as he did of old, we must rehearse, though with trembling awe, somewhat the old, old story. When Sinai trembled then God spoke; now in a stiller voice he speaks. And shall not men listen because his voice is low—because his thunders do not roll? Sweet is this voice that speaks now here upon the earth among men. It is the voice of love ; the voice that the prophet heard, as he lay wrapped in his mantle at the base of Sinai's mount, on the hard earth. It soothes the soul, it calms each troubled breast.

Some four hundred years had passed since last this voice of God had been heard through the mouth of his servant, the prophet Malachi. Then God spake in mixed anger and love. What distress had the nation endured since then, what persecutions had it suffered ! Chief among its persecutors was the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes ; of whom Tacitus says, that he "formed a plan to weed out so dire a superstition from the face of the earth." What heroic valor was then exhibited ! Under the Maccabees the Jews came out victorious, and remained an independent nation until the time of Pompey and the Cæsars. Finally the Roman rule prevailed, though under Herod the Great to a great extent Judea was an independent monarchy. Yet through all this king's long reign there was more or less dependence upon and subserviency to the Roman empire. Herod had received the kingdom from Antony and Augustus, and held it in some degree subject to their authority. This must be conceded, however absolute his rule was with his own subjects. Cæsar Augustus did not interfere here. Besides, the tie of friendship was strong between the two, while Marcus Agrippa, the great friend and chief minister of Augustus, was a very dear friend of Herod, king of the Jews. Close was the connection between Rome and Jerusalem ; they seemed to be bound to each other, notwithstanding the difference in religion, by inseparable ties. Indeed Herod weakened his authority among the Jews, and incurred more or less odium by leaning too much towards Roman customs, even to introducing the amphitheater with its bloody spectacles, and profane musical exhibitions within the walls of the city. This was sad indeed, and caused great heart searching among the elders of Israel ; though of course there were those who were glad of these innovations and were too ready to depart from the customs of their ancestors. Still Herod was very observant of Jewish rites ; he did not interfere to any great extent with the priestly succession, and sought by rebuilding with great magnificence the Jewish temple to wipe out the odium which he had incurred. The vast wealth which he had acquired, he lavished freely on this building, so that when completed it recalled the grandeur of the first temple, built and embellished by Solomon. All the services of the house were put on the most costly footing, as if it had been purposely prepared to receive its new master, "even the messenger of the covenant" for whom all were so anxiously looking, and who was suddenly to make his glorious appearance among them.

Already the sun was beginning slowly to descend toward the Mediterranean sea and to quench itself in its waves, now gilding hill top, plain and shore with its declining rays, as evening prayer was held, and the evening incense was laid on the altar within the temple, that temple so dear to innumerable hearts, a temple, to many, more cherished than life itself. In the court of the women, as usual at the daily hour of prayer, a crowd of male worshipers were assembled as usual at the daily hour of prayer, while the galleries around the court were filled with women, all taking part in the evening service. Sacred was the scene; soft and still the evening hour. The incense floated around, its sweet perfume filling the air. Silence, deep and profound, prevailed, for the priest had disappeared within the temple, and, with the evening incense, they knew he was offering prayer for himself and the people. Who shall disturb a silence so deep? who so undevout as in any way to interrupt a moment so sacred, so withdrawn from all earthly objects? Even the song had ceased. If there was any sound, it was that of the swallow flying about the altar, where she had built her nest, and where unmolested she reared her young, their twittering chirp perhaps just heard, as safely they nestle in their straw built nest.

Among the Jews there were different degrees of inspiration, some absolutely authoritative and applying to the whole of their sacred canon; but they also had an inferior kind of inspiration, which was nevertheless recognised as the voice of God, and went by the name of "bath kol." They were not without this all-animating and guiding voice during the entire interval from the closing of the Old Testament canon, to the hour when God spake anew from heaven in the new temple built by Herod, thus ushering in the same authoritative revelation as that of old,—the same by which the holy prophets wrote and spoke.

Among instances of the less authoritative revelation, known as "bath-kol," was the announcement of a victory gained by the sons of John Hyrcanus over the Syrians, at the very moment it was achieved; though the field of battle was far distant from Jerusalem, where the good king at the time was officiating as priest. From the precincts of the sacred shrine the king at the hour of evening prayer, when the people were assembled for worship, came forth and told them that his sons Aristobulus and Antigonus were victorious; and that Antiochus Cyzicenus, the Syrian king, had been vanquished, and his army was seeking safety in flight. The news that soon followed showed that God had indeed spoken to his servant; for what was said was confirmed by the event. Indeed the history of the Maccabees, their struggle against their enemies, the way they rose above overwhelming forces, revives a recollection of the days of Joshua and the Judges, showing the hand of God so clearly in their repeated deliverances, that none but those who eschew the Divine providence can fail to see that God was with them of a truth. Indeed his especial providence was with them as of old, and, as in the case of the good king John Hyrcanus, did God speak and show things to come. It was a low voice that spoke, but still it was the voice of God;—the voice that whispers in the trees—that sighs in the evening wind—that gently fans the trembling leaves. Why should not that voice oracularly speak to man? man the friend and companion of his Maker. Why interpose insuperable obstacles between God and man? building a wall so high that God himself cannot pass beyond it? Is man so far off from God? has God so little interest in him? is he a mere waif on the sea, tossed to and fro with no guide or overseer?

Is there any reason in this supposition? Does it consist with the relation of man to his Maker? or is it wholly at variance with this relation?

At length the old inspiration has come again—the multitude are waiting without. The priest appears—his face is pale, his voice is dumb. Not by Urim and Thummim has God now again spoken; that oracle is closed—it belonged not to the second temple, only to the first. But the coal that touched Isaiah's hallowed lips with fire, has touched human lips once more, and God has put himself in direct communication again with his creature man! The vail is drawn aside—the invisible appears in sight! What the communication is, is not made known yet, but it is evident one has been made. By some sufficiently significant sign this is apparent to all. A strange awe falls upon the multitude.—Perhaps the news spreads from street to street, from house to house—all the more impressive because as yet it has received no definite form. But the character of the priest, the general esteem in which he is held, certifies the fact.

Here is no cunningly contrived plan, the first dark link in a long chain of deceit. Who is to be the gainer by this? what object is proposed? Ere long the chief actor will be removed, and what motive actuates him to figure in a drama in which he will have no future part; in which indeed nearly all the participators in the scene will have passed away ere it is ready for the public stage. Had what now has taken place been followed by no corresponding results, we might have imagined a delusion, a vision of fancy, but the great events that were linked with this amazing spectacle make this impossible. It was the first, the very first step, in a series of events which has changed the face of the world. It stands not alone, isolated, like a solitary column amid the sandy desert. It is a part of a magnificent structure finished, complete, whose dome towers to the heaven.

A single footstep on the shore of the silent sea, may startle and alarm, but many foot-prints teach us that we are not alone sole occupants of a desert isle. What whispers were in the air that eventful night! What messengers were rushing through the skies! One of them was winging his way back, swiftly flying to the eternal throne, having as a harbinger delivered his message to one of God's chosen servants—to an aged priest named Zachariah of the course of Abia. This was the message—the word brought direct from the throne of God: "Fear not Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice at his birth.* In the dim twilight had stood Gabriel, amid the sombre gloom of the windowless temple radiant with light.

Here, still, on this very afternoon, within the Holy of Holies, the Mercy seat rested as of old; but the cloud of glory was a long time gone. Aaron's rod budded no more; the golden pot of manna had disappeared. Yet this was the place that God chose to revisit again, filling it with a glory that exceeded all that had gone before. The first note of a new revelation issued from this place; it came directly from heaven, and was accompanied by a thousand whispering voices. The tidings of those present on this memorable occasion went through the land, arousing hope, kindling vigilance, and putting a nation on the tiptoe of expectation. Who can describe the feelings of that aged priest as he wended his way back to Hebron; the joy he imparted to his wife; the holy awe, the deep solemnity, the transport, that filled and permeated their bosoms from that time until the accomplishment of the great event? The week of the service of the priest at the temple was over, but what a week!

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*Luke i. 13, 14.

CHAPTER II.

A RECITAL OF SUCCEEDING OCCURRENCES RAPIDLY TRANSPIRING, FOLLOWED BY A LONG UNBROKEN SILENCE.

WE are fully aware that we are treading on beaten ground—ground trodden by ten thousand feet. Still we cannot omit these preparatory words. They are necessary to the work. Neither can these scenes be made stale by ten thousand repetitions. Like the rising and setting of the sun they are ever new. Like the fresh grass springing under our feet they are ever gladly trodden. Like the melody of the rippling brook stealing through the enameled meadows, their music is ever sweet. They are like the breath of spring; like to the smell of the new mown hay; like whatever is most dear to the human heart.

The scene in the temple—the message of the angel—its wonderful import—the source whence it came—the long, long silence it broke in upon—the hopes it imparted—the joy it inspired—the future which it unveiled—was an event so big with the future of our earth—so true—so dramatic—that like the most sacred memories it can never grow old—never, never tire. It will always be as fresh as life itself when its morning first dawns on the youthful heart, when all the horizon is gilded with unfading light.

Two births came after this;—but what births! Two children were born; but what children! Heaven announced they came into existence. They were related, humanly speaking, but never met in childhood's early hour, nor until long years had intervened, and filled their course. They were kept asunder by a mysterious intervention, and for a purpose. Though painters have loved to represent these two as passing their infant hours together, yet they have erred in this, giving the reins to fancy instead of adhering to historical truths. In solitude both grew up; as plants hidden away in some solitary place by some running brook. Long their odor seemed wasted upon the desert air. Strange portents crowded around their cradles; but in the one case far more so than in the other. Mystery as a weird spell settled on the birth of each; but it was like the mystery of eternity itself. God was in it; his hand traced the plan, employed the instruments, and wrought out the wonderful consummation.

From ages long back these wonderful scenes had been slowly preparing. The stage was large ; the time the whole of earth's duration. The sun shone for this ; the stars set for this ; nothing of earth or time but had some relation to this. The rise and fall of kingdoms and of empires, the long line of kings and rulers,—appearing and disappearing, shadows rather than substances—did but reign for this. All marvels and changes did but transpire for this ; the revolutions of ages did but roll around to ripen all things for this grand event, the birth of these two wonderful children. Yet in silence were they born ; the prodigies that attended their birth were known to but few, though earth and heaven were moved when they came into the world. Kings and princes attended not at their birth ; no gorgeous tapestry was drawn around their cradles. They were nursed in the lap of comparative indigence.

They who were to move the world and revolutionize society, whose influence was to be felt to the uttermost extent of this round earth had none of the appendages of royal birth. Silent as a snow flake they came into our every day world. But while we speak of the two with one breath, language can never adequately make plain and evident the immense disproportion between the two. If we speak of them together it is because, that like two streams, they issue from a common source ; they are both born into the same world alike. But soon the streams diverge : one is soon lost, as in a sandy desert, the other sweeps on, boundless in its expanse, losing itself only in the ocean of eternity from whence it came. Can it then in any way be deemed astonishing that mighty marvels should attend the birth of such a child; marvels exceeding those attendent on any other birth.

As to the faith, the wondrous faith of the virgin mother,—mother of the child who was called "Wonderful," so many centuries before his birth, we may ask, Whence came it? by what means was it made so strong, so perfected, in a youthful maiden; one on whose cheek the first blush of life's morning still rested? Like Jonah's gourd did it grow up in a single night? Or like that of all who were in any way connected with the birth of Christ, was it the product of long years of growth and ripening? Such faith, so mature, so perfect, on which no shadow of doubt rests, is of slow attainment.

We know to a certainty she had long been the beloved of heaven—the angel Gabriel assures us of this. We may therefore fairly and logically conclude that from her earliest childhood she had "known the Scriptures,"—had traced in them the long line of prophecy pointing to and culminating in Christ,—while her heart was warmed with a holy fervor, and all her being absorbed in devout contemplation. The fire was fed from off the altar of the sanctuary; and she walked through childhood's early years in the purity of love and the sweetness of innocence. A habit of deep reflection was early formed, which was strengthened throughout her whole subsequent life continually; of which we have sufficient proof from the sacred records. To whom but to one highly favored by God, taught from above, consecrated to his service, walking before him in entire innocency of life, and selected for a great and special purpose by the wisdom of the Infinite, could the words of the heavenly messenger have been addressed,—"Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee : blessed art thou among women."† "Elect and precious," this youthful maiden was fully prepared for her great work by long previous training, by the highest cultivation of her heart and understanding, and by heavenly manifestations. Hence the strength of her faith ; so remarkable in one so young ; and which prepared her to rise superior to every obstacle, and to stand complete with all the fulness of the Godhead.

In a room in the humble home of her parents were the words spoken :—those parents the lineal descendants of a royal line. But their lineage was unacknowledged, if not wholly unknown. On the family register it stood traced in unfading lines, securely guarded against all contingencies. This favored home among the hills of Galilee, stood remote, apart, as a nest of a bird in a cliff, or sheltered tree by the side of a rock. The busy throng passed by it; the tumult of cities invaded it not. It was no mart of commerce, though not far from Sepphoris the capital of Galilee. It had its own quiet ways and rural beauty. Its villagers were a plain, robust and busy people, like all those of Upper Galilee ; neither was there any reason why a ban should be put upon it, as if it were worse on any account than

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* John 2. 51. and 2. 28.

other villages of Galilee, crowded as this district of the country was with numerous populous towns and villages, as Josephus, who ought to know, has so emphatically stated. The inhabitants of Nazareth were on the whole neither better nor worse than their neighbors : on the contrary the privacy of the town, the secluded district, would rather seem to favor simplicity of manners, and an exemption from the vices of larger communities.* Nay, was it not surrounded as by a wall of fire, in view of what was to take place there ? The influences of even a single family for good, in so small a place would not fail to be felt. In a house then in this secluded village, in a room in this house, did this daughter of a line of kings, however then unnoticed and unknown, receive an angelic messenger—the same that appeared a few months previous in the temple on a similar errand.

Thus near can God come, and thus near does God come to man—all of sophistry and vain reasoning to the contrary. Born for this purpose—planted by the hand of God as a plant in a garden ; chosen from and blessed above all women, this youthful maiden was fully prepared for the celestial visitant. Still was the hour, sweet the scene as when God erst visited Eden to commune with man, as the angel entering, salutes the maiden, and makes the wonderful announcement. Descended from a royal line, from her is to come a governor who shall rule over the people of Israel, and establish a throne that is to be perpetual.

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* "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" is neither more nor less than a reference to the Messiah ; as under the designation "That good Thing," the Messiah is predicted. See John 7. 41. also Jer. chap.

Though now occupied by no lineal descendant of the house of David, and doomed to descend to a lower condition still, and long to remain so—without teraphim or ruler—yet will that throne stand, and the nation rise anew, its ancient splendor more than restored, through the all-conquering faith of that youthful maiden, standing in virgin bashfulness in the presence of the messenger from the right hand of the Most High.

While these things were transpiring, other actors were preparing to take their parts in the grand drama of time. Other links were preparing in the long chain of successive events; private rehearsals were going on; so that when the time came for the curtain to rise, and the wondrous spectacle to begin, every part might be well studied, each performer prepared, and the whole presented with a harmony and completeness that would show perfect unity of design with successful execution.

But the beauty of the whole, that which chiefly attracts our attention and fills us with wonder, is, that the different actors were for the most part unknown to each other—they had no connection with each other. In solitude and silence they were prepared for their work, and to fill their respective places, like the stones of the temple hewn out by the sculptor, each one separate and apart, none as yet fully conscious of what all this preparation meant.

In the far East, in this "Land of the sun,"—to the east of the swiftly flowing Tigris, there were men who might almost be called divine men—men in communication with the Deity, who were in a course of training, under the direct superintendence of the Almighty; and who were to figure in the coming scenes that would soon burst upon an awe-struck, astonished world. What though they were not of the sacred nation, but followers of Zoroaster, that light of the East, yet from their sacred book Zendavesta, (little else than a compilation of the Jewish Scriptures,) they had learned of God's great design toward our world; and especially of the coming of that wonderful child, the King of the Jews.

God did not confine himself to one land, or to one class of witnesses; he spoke to other men, in a far distant land from that where the scene was laid, and the child was to be born. Under the cloudless sky of distant Persia not far from ancient Persepolis, that city of renown, so famed in history, so tragic in its end, did these men nurse their thoughts—muse upon coming events—exercise their faith, and look forward to the time when a star should arise—a star of resplendent lustre, even the Governor and Ruler of Israel.

Most definite were their conceptions, most clear their illumination. Their knowledge was heaven-imparted. Whether by dreams or direct revelation it matters not. A King was to be born; such a King as the world never before saw. The line of David was to be revived;—Judah to take her place once more among the nations of the earth; not now, perhaps, but sooner or later. This they saw; of this they were assured in the most undoubting manner, as after events fully showed. Indeed the peculiarity of their faith was that it was perfect. There was no hesitancy, no doubt. Nothing could show a stronger confidence than all their proceedings from the time they received their commission until its full and most exact accomplishment. Heaven-directed they went on their way.

There are also other actors repeating their parts; in obscurity silently preparing to appear on the great stage at the proper time, and with an effect never before reached. What though they are seen but once, and then disappear, yet nothing can transcend the importance of their testimony. They also were raised up to bear witness of the truth; to testify of that which they had seen and known. They were living witnesses, everywhere carrying the joyful story; narrating it to listening ears, and deeply impressing innumerable hearts. Not unprepared were these for the great event when it should come. On those plains where David fed his flock, watching them by night; where he contemplated the glory of the heavens; where the fire of inspiration was first kindled in his youthful bosom, while yet a lad, with his oaten pipe and shepherd's crook, there also God appeared again to speak to other hearts as he did to the son of Jesse; ministering to them divine consolation; and instructing them in the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. He who has never left himself without a witness in any age or clime, spake to these keepers of their flocks on the plains of Bethlehem. Before the time came, he spake to them of David's greater son—showed them from the very words of David, that the royal line was still unbroken; that the time was at hand, and they would see it, when a child would be born, and inherit David's kingdom, and his throne be established to all generations.

To no other conclusion can we fairly come when we recollect how they first received the heavenly message. Theirs was an intelligent faith, a faith matured by thought and study and holy contemplation. Not an unripe faith—the offspring of momentary excitation, and the result of a transient manifestation. Far from this. This would be unworthy of God; unworthy of the momentous occasion. God has never dealt so with any of his chosen witnesses, as the whole of sacred history abundantly confirms. Their hearts were warm, their mind instructed—their vision open, like that of the magi, before they heard the voice or saw the angelic messenger.—Not rude, barbarous, unlettered were they; slaves or servants of a master. Ignorant they could not be, conversant as no doubt they were, from the very fact of their mission, with the Holy Scriptures.—Who can be unlearned with this book in his hand? with its words of wisdom, its voice of inspiration?—No, they were not ignorant. They led, it is true, a pastoral life; but in that land, and among that agricultural people this was no proof of inferiority of condition, or want of mental culture; and as they were especially selected by God himself for the fulfilment of a great mission, who can doubt but that in every sense they were competent for their work. To doubt this would be to reflect upon God.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT IS TAKING PLACE AT JERUSALEM WHILE THESE THINGS, THIS PREPARATION WAS GOING ON ELSEWHERE.

JERUSALEM had also its witnesses slowly preparing in secret.

Amid its perturbations, its civil commotions, its family discords in high places, its perpetual unrest, amid wars and factions, there were under the very eaves, if not within the precincts of the temple, others of these forth-coming witnesses who were to bear testimony to the faithfulness of God. It would seem as if those most highly favored of God, who have been called to give the most decided testimony to his name, and whose influence is destined to be of the most enduring and wide-spreading character, especially in connection with the first establishment of the truth, are those who have come forth as anchorites from their caves; having lived long in seclusion, and mostly separated from their fellows and from ordinary pursuits. These are chosen vessels.

Even superstition has resorted to caves and dens of the earth, as if thus they would shed around even a false system a halo of superior sanctity. To feign interviews with the gods, kings and law-givers have retired from society, and from the usual haunts of men, to give greater sanction to their laws, and transmit them more surely to posterity. But with those to whom we refer there was nothing of this. No pretended visions, no false or vain assumptions. Every thing was real and true. Most eminently so of those to whom we now refer. There was Anna the prophetess, daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher, born in the closing years of the reign of the good king John Hyrcanus; married in the eleventh year of the reign of his son and successor, Alexander Jannæus, that warlike king. She soon was left a widow; and from that time, for long, long years, coming to Jerusalem, she gave herself up wholly to the service of God, almost taking up her abode in the temple; living a life of prayer; making herself practically useful by acts of beneficence; giving to the poor, and ministering to them; not allowing her piety to evaporate into mere sentimentalism; and all the while, under the inspiration of Heaven, looking forward to the coming of Him who should redeem Israel. This was the glorious vision ever before her eyes; animating her soul, and giving joy and gladness to all these waiting years. She was filled with the very spirit of prophecy; casting continually her eye back upon the long line of Messianic predictions—studying them; and the more so, because the spirit of Christ which was in her glowingly assured her that they were on the very eve of fulfillment. This was the grand peculiarity of her mission;—she knew the time was at hand!

Let no one say this is assumption on the part of the writer. Her vocation—so high, so holy—the inspiration with which she was endowed, and which in the absence of all evidence to the contrary, it must be admitted, was universally conceded in the city in which she dwelt ; all answer to, and conspire to support her prophetic character, and to prove her mission. Beside this, after the lapse of so many years—more years than belong to the ordinary life of man,—the actual coming of Christ which she had been all the while foretelling, and that with an undoubting faith,—was seen in the person of the holy child Jesus, when first presented in the temple. How high beat her heart in that most joyful moment of her existence ; and how happy she must have felt for this demonstration of the truth of her words !

When events do not turn out as predicted, we have no reason to believe that they were inspired of God ; but when they do, and were evidently beyond the reach of accident or contrivance, far beyond human ken, then we have every reason to receive them as the oracles of heaven. So it was in this case ; and we are bound to admit that Anna was an extraordinary woman, and chosen of God as one called and qualified to bear witness of Christ.

Not in the land of fable must we place this short and sweetly simple history ; but interweave it as part and parcel of the holy oracles ; and, like the story of Ruth, in the earlier annals of the Jewish church, give it its due prominence in our minds, and its dwelling place in our hearts.

Every thing of this kind tends to the confirmation of our faith ; and we may as well remove the foundation of a house, and expect it to stand, as to make these earliest annals of our faith mythical.

Rome may stand, and Livy be denounced as a story teller, as blending fable with fact, (though even here we doubt not the spirit of modern criticism is unbendingly exacting,) but not so with Christianity. It has nothing to do with the fabulous or legendary tales. What it recites belongs to an age of enlightenment ; when the literary tendency of the age was more to scepticism than to credulity ; and when what was supernatural was not likely to pass current even among the Jewish people, much less the Roman, without the most rigid examination.

To the same category as that of Anna belongs the testimony of Simeon the aged. Another link in the unbroken chain. What is said of him is of similar import with that of all the rest. He stands forth as another shining witness of the birth of Christ. God, yielding to the natural wish that when " the Heir of all things" was about to be born into the world, and to claim possession of the whole earth as his rightful inheritance,—that there shall be ample testimony, and a sufficient number of witnesses to substantiate his title, and guard against all conflicting claims. His heirship must neither be doubted nor disputed for want of a sufficient number of competent and unimpeachable witnesses. So when the kings of the earth are about to have an heir born to the throne, they summon the most distinguished nobility of the realm to be present, so as to asseverate the birth of the rightful heir,—extinguish all false claims, and establish an undisputed succession to the throne. Thus Simeon steps on the stage. A man well known ; venerable for his age ; esteemed for his piety ; to whom all did reverence. He, also, possessed, as well as the prophetess Anna, in a wonderful manner, the Spirit of God. Prophecy was revived in him, such as that which dwelt in the prophets of old, and was imparted to this highly favored witness to the first coming of Christ. He too saw the glory to come; that glory that was announced to Moses, the servant of the Lord, in a most interesting crisis of Jewish history; the glory that was yet to fill the earth:* and this it was that cheered him in his long and lonesome pilgrimage, and made old age happier than his youthful prime. His eyes were ever intently fastened on the golden pinnacles, glittering in the noonday sun of the new city, capital of the whole earth.† On this he ever fixed his longing gaze, won by its beauty which was beyond compare; and before which the mightiest cities paled, as day before night. And well he knew that before he died he should see "the King in his beauty;" the child of wonder, without beginning of years or end of days; —take him in his aged, trembling arms, and proclaim him heir of the world. This had been made known to him by a revelation from heaven for many long revolving years before it actually came to pass; but in all these years he never doubted; his faith was strong, unwavering; and it lent light to his eyes, agility to his feet, and strength to his tottering limbs, when otherwise he would have leaned on his staff, and his strength have failed for very age.

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* "But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." Numb. 14. 21.

† "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one." Zech. 64. 9.

These two witnesses, so venerable for their age, so noted for piety, so remarkable for their faith, were like two oaks, the last of the forest, sole survivors, standing alone in their majesty and strength. None that passed by could fail to notice them, and feel the impress that they made. Their testimony was ever one and the same; the coming Kingdom of Christ; and corresponded with the universal expectation of the age; a testimony corroborated by such authors as Suetonius, who tells us, that, at this very time, such a King as the world never before saw, was about to proceed from Judea.

Jerusalem, then in its glory, was to be the focus of the great light: other lands might catch by reflection its glistening beams, but from this center was it to radiate; dispelling darkness, removing superstition, humanizing mankind, fostering and elevating the race, placing on every altar pure incense, and making one Lord the object of worship for the whole earth.

To introduce and substantiate a birth, the future result of which was to change the face of the whole world, were all these witnesses cited; and one by one having done this, they disappeared from the stage.

The herald—the precursor of the coming Ruler of the Jews, beside the miracle of his birth, must be illuminated from on high; and made thoroughly conversant with the august majesty that he was called to introduce to the world.

Without this important knowledge, the knowledge of the divine nature of Jesus, he could not be a competent witness ; he could not suitably fill his high office. He must know whom he represented ; else of what would his testimony avail. Pre-announced hundreds of years before he was born as the precursor of the Son of heaven and earth,* the chosen herald to announce the near approach of the King of glory, he could not have spoken of him as he did if he had not known who Christ really was ; and greeted him not merely as David's son, but also as the root of the house of David. For this reason the veil was early removed from his eyes ; and while the immediate disciples were more or less blinded, "seeing men as trees walking," ignorant of the Father, as they themselves frankly acknowledged—his fore-runner basked in the full blaze of the gospel day.

When the news of these two wonderful births was spread abroad,—of one in southern Judea, of the other in Bethlehem, the town of David,—as all Jews admitted was the designated birth-place of the King of the Jews,—how great must have been the sensation which was produced, and especially when all the circumstances attending these births were narrated.

So too when the days of purification were over, and the newly born babe was presented in the temple ; how did those in the courts of the temple look on, and with what silent awe did they listen, as

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*"And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways: to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins." Luke 76. 77.

Simeon announced to the people the birth of their Prince ; presenting him to them as the Hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof in time of trouble. Then Anna came on the scene, confirming all that had been spoken, and adding her unimpeachable testimony to that of Simeon. Last of all, the parents, having with the child returned to Bethlehem, came the Magi with their gifts from the far distant East, and acknowledged him to be the rightful king of the Jews :—not of the Jews only, but ultimately King of the whole earth. Their testimony then, to that of the rest, must be added. The whole forming a chain of evidence not easily broken ; and which ought to bring conviction to every unprejudiced thinking mind.

What a simple story they all tell. What had the shepherds to gain by invention on their part ; and what would their story have amounted to if it had not been confirmed by subsequent events. There was not a Jew in the land who was not concerned in exposing the fabrication if it was a sensational story which the shepherds were framing, and spreading broadcast over all that region of country. So with the Magi ;—what selfish end would they subserve to repay them for their long and toilsome journey ? What they did was it not done at the peril of their lives ? And as for Simeon, and Anna the prophetess, were they not both standing on the utmost verge of life ? And after lives of self-denial and devotion, are they about to step into their graves with a silly falsehood ? How unreasonable is all this. Who brought these persons together so opportunely ? How was it that their testimony so agreed? There was no discrepancy; they had never met; they had never concocted the scheme. These were plain men, incapable of forming, much less of executing such a preposterous farce.

The angels—who brought them on the scene? How was it that all converged to Bethlehem; and was even displayed in the temple; and that the issue of all was, that then a King was born, who, after centuries have elapsed still retains the name; and whose sceptre, if we can believe what is past—what has already been accomplished—will yet be extended over the entire habitable globe!

BOOK SECOND.

PRELIMINARY.

THE interval from the visit of the child Jesus to the Temple, to the opening of a new dispensation in the history of our world, covers quite a space of time. No great change took place in Judea during this period; annexed to Syria, as part of that province, receiving its governors from Rome; it shared in the general tranquillity of the Roman Empire. Throughout the latter years of Cæsar Augustus, its governors were often changed; but in the entire reign of Tiberius, it had but two, Valerius Grotus and Pontius Pilate.

Rome itself, with all its provinces, was, for the most part, at rest. The Germans gave some trouble, but Germanicus soon quieted them. The disposition of Tiberius was for peace; as was also that of Augustus during the last part of his eventful reign. The gates of Janus had been shut but twice up to the time of Augustus; whereas while he ruled the empire they had been thrice closed. They were shut when the Prince of Peace was born.

Tiberius Cæsar was leaving Rome and retiring to the island of Caprea, where he spent the remainder of his life, (never once again entering the city,) in this period so remarkable,—covering the great events that were transpiring in Judea comprising the ministry of Christ and that of his fore-runner John the Baptist.

John's voice was first heard proclaiming the speedy appearing of Christ in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, dating from the time that Cæsar Augustus "admitted him into copartnership of command and sovereignty with himself." While, therefore, the whole of this time we must conceive of Tiberius as dwelling on the island which his residence there has made so famous;—as issuing his edicts from that remote and solitary spot;—leaving it but twice to sail slowly along the Campanian shore—and once coming in sight of the city, but retiring without entering it. Rome was clothed in sackcloth during all these eventful years, owing to the tyranny of this successor of Cæsar Augustus—the third in order of time of the Roman emperors.

CHAPTER I.

THE WILDERNESS.

BUT a little distance from Jerusalem was the wilderness of Judea, turning to the right as you go to Jericho. It had been a place of retreat for the Maccabees in the hour of danger, when pressed by the overwhelming forces of the Syrians; and at the very time of which we are treating, the sect of the Essenes—separate from the rites of the temple, and worshipping God in their own way—lived there in a state of almost absolute seclusion, forming a religious, ascetic community by themselves.

This desolate wilderness, these drear mountains, overhanging the Dead Sea, had their sweet spots, their pleasant places, interposed amid the barren wilds, the deep glens, and the dark descending ravines. Perhaps there was no such happy community existing at that time as that of the Essenes; and though they did not conform in all respects to the Jewish worship, God did not condemn them for that. There were those among them that had the spirit of prophecy, which was shown on various occasions; while their blameless lives spoke volumes for the depth and sincerity of their convictions.

On the very top of one of the highest of this chain of mountains girding the western side of the Dead Sea, and where you might suppose that nothing but barrenness would be found, was a level space of considerable extent of the richest soil. There was no more fertile spot. On this almost inaccessible height Herod the first had built a strong castle, designed as a place of refuge for himself and his family, in those disastrous times, when both his life and theirs were so often in danger. About midway down one of these steep mountains on the side of the Dead Sea, as you descend towards the shore there is a sheltering cave or grotto, in the centre of which bubbles up a living stream of the purest and sweetest water, well known under the romantic name of the "Diamond of the desert."

In this wilderness, then, not wholly left to wild beasts and desolation, not wholly parched by drouth, or destitute of living springs, was the home of the precursor of Christ, set apart as from of old. Here he was to grow up in security and silence for the most part unnoticed and unknown. He lived not with the Essenes, of which we have proof in the fact that this sect rejected sacrificial offerings, while the key note of the mission of our Lord's precursor was, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!" a declaration showing that he recognized the typical and ceremonial daily offering in the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem, though he himself participated not, so far as we know, or can judge, in these religious and indeed divinely appointed ordinances.

At what time he left Hebron, the home of his parents, the place of his birth, we know not: somewhere probably about the time of passing from adolescence to manhood. All the associations of his early life were sacred; and when he left those long time precincts, hallowed by such memories, he had but to cross the intervening hill country eastward in a straight line for a few miles ere he reached the wilderness where he passed several solitary and meditative years; like Moses in the desert of Sinai, ere he made his public entry as heaven's messenger to his people, saying to them with winged words, *"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and say unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her

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* Isa. 40. 1, 2.

iniquity is pardoned: for she has received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

These were years sacred to reflection, to holy musing upon his great work, to preparation for his high office. All his life from earliest childhood—even from the womb,—had been a preparation for this: but these later years were especially so. Dissociated in a great measure from society, separated, even in a sense that Jesus was not, from the charms of home, from family endearments; he was nurtured under a severer discipline, and, as a Nazarene, walked by a more rigid rule.

Like to his great prototype the prophet Elijah, under the first covenant, while his soul burned with love, and was filled with the tenderest compassion, the nature of his work, and the peculiar character of his office, called for a sterner life, inasmuch as he came with a rod in his hand, with words of reproof upon his lips, and loud warning in order to prepare the way for the softer words of his divine master. His province was to break in pieces the stony heart, to break up the fallow ground.

It was an age of degeneracy, like that in the reign of Ahab, when Elijah dropped as from the clouds among the people of Israel. Conformably to his office and his message was his life; so that when he appeared and lifted up his voice the people quickly acknowledged in him another Elijah. They saw in him, this young, heroic man, the line of prophets renewed. Even to his coarse food and rough mantle, and his abstinence from strong drink, they traced the resemblance; and were the more prepared to receive his message, and comply with his demands.

Thus the years passed swiftly by spent in the wilderness, till at length the hour long since fixed in the Divine counsel, arrived for the public proclamation of his mission. Then God appeared to him as when an angel was sent to his father Zacharias, about a quarter of a century before, as he ministered in the temple—to announce the birth of this extraordinary child ; and to open anew in the most direct and authoritative manner the intercourse between the visible and the invisible world ; between God and man. The same angel, probably Gabriel, who was sent to his father. The same angel who appeared to the virgin Mary,* in the town of Nazareth, a city of Galilee,—flying again swiftly from heaven to earth, appeared to the son dwelling in the wilderness of Judea. Perhaps the hour was the same as that in which he appeared to the father—just as the priest appointed for that service on that day, fulfilling his course, was offering up the evening incense.

The scene was changed from the temple to the wilderness. One of the actors was gone, but it was a continuation of the same series of events, of which that in the temple was the first in order of time. The heavenly messenger that was employed then is sent forth now to the earth again, and announces himself to the expectant John, declared by his father, at the time of his circumcision, as "the prophet of the Highest," who was to precede him, and prepare the way for his personal appearance among his own highly favored people.*

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* See Matt. I. 20.

In the course of this memorable interview we learn, from the express words of John, the purport of the angel's message; neither more nor less, on an occasion so important, so fraught with great results, involving the best interests of the human race, than to notify him that the hour had arrived to begin his great work, and to stand forth as the harbinger of Christ; giving him at the same time an infallible sign by which he would at the proper time be enabled surely to recognize the Messiah, and proclaim him as such, to the children of Israel, with the sanction of heaven itself. We know nothing of John's feelings at the time; neither are any particulars of the heavenly manifestation given; but we may be sure he was filled with holy awe—that the place of the feet of the angel, as a messenger from God, was glorious; and that there was no doubt in the mind of John but that the message was directly from God.†

With the message, and the angel messenger, came for the first time as a divine institution, the rite, so sacred on account of the source whence it came—that is from heaven—of the holy ordinance of water baptism. There can be no just doubt of the heavenly origin of this rite from the fact above adduced; as well as from the confirmation of the same by the words of our Lord himself spoken at a later period, and addressed to the Jews, as a vindication of John, and of its use, both by himself and his associates.*

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* Luke 1. 76.

† There can be no reasonable doubt as to this angelic visit to John in the wilderness. His own words are all-sufficient: they are as follows: "He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." John 1. 33.

The work of John thus marked out by a divine hand, and the hour fixed, the time and place pointed out, there was no room for further delay. Cased in panoply divine, he was now to go forth to glorious warfare; leaving the wilderness, bidding it a last adieu, destined to return to it no more—taking his life in his hands, knowing full well the fate of his predecessors, and therefore not "counting his life dear unto him," prepared to labor and to suffer reproach, to live or to die, as the case might be.

Many a prophet had been stoned to death before in the fulfillment of duty; and if that should be his ultimate fate he would not on that account withdraw from the contest, or prove recreant to so Godlike a cause. None the less courageous was he than the prophets who had preceded him; surely his cause was none the less weighty; nay, his office and his work surpassed that of all of them,—even that of his great prototype Elijah. Neither were the times less hazardous; and to show the people their sin, and rebuke iniquity in high places, was as perilous as ever.

Under these circumstances, and in full view of his danger, as premonished by the past, did this knight of the cross, this dauntless soldier for Jesus, this herald and precursor of Christ,—gird on his sword, buckle on his armor, wave his banner, and step forth into the field; with this war cry in his mouth, and emblazoned on his shield, "I AM THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD, AS SAITH THE PROPHET ESAIAS."*

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* "The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?"

CHAPTER III.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS IN THE JORDAN.

FOR the long space of two years and a half, dating from the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, had John proclaimed the near approach, and expected coming of Christ, confining his labors, so far as the record goes, exclusively to the valley of the Jordan, ranging the banks of the river on either side; the people coming to him in crowds, he not going to them. He began his ministry in the spring of the year, at the time of the Paschal Feast, when Jews from every part of the world were present at Jerusalem—the concourse of the people immense, continuing his labors incessantly for the time mentioned up to the Feast of the Tabernacles held midway of the third year. This was the period—the appointed season, for Jesus to make his first public appearance among the people of Israel. Up to this pregnant moment he had remained secluded among the hills of Galilee, in the sequestered village of Nazareth. His first movement was to the valley of the Jordan to John's baptism, to give his sanction to that solemn rite as a divine institution, newly appointed of Heaven, standing alone and apart by itself, and inaugurating the Christian dispensation, not as distinct from Judaism, but as part and parcel of it. To it therefore Jesus came, "travelling in the greatness of his strength," for the year of the Lord's redeemed had come; and the day of vengeance (in a loving and tender sense) not in the way of judgment, had indeed at last fully come. At least the first steps were now taken as initiatory of the world's redemption; and the removal of the original curse from off this groaning earth. Never before did warrior enter such a field as this; never were stakes laid down upon the issue of which so much depended; never did earthly monarch set forth on such a march for universal empire.

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* Isa. 40. 3. John 1. 23.

It was by a private token, given to him from heaven, like unto that which Simeon received when in the temple he bore testimony to the Lord's Christ, then an infant in his mother's arms, that John recognized Jesus before the hour of baptism. Though related through his mother, the venerable and sainted Elizabeth, to Mary, the virgin mother; though Mary, after the annunciation, had visited Elizabeth, and spent three months in Hebron, yet until this favored hour, John, though instructed in all things respecting that visit by his mother, as we may reasonably conclude, had no personal knowledge of Christ ; and now, as he makes his appearance among the thousands of Israel that crowded still to his baptism, John sees and recognizes him for the first time.*

During all the foregoing part of his ministry, having lasted already two years and a half, and now fast approaching its termination, he had pre-announced Jesus to the anxiously inquiring multitude : saying in so many words, though doubtless greatly enlarging in his exhortation on the theme, " He that cometh AFTER me is preferred before me ; for he was before me."†

He had also said to the expecting multitude, time and again, in the course of his public ministry, the people attentively listening, but not understanding his words,—" I indeed baptize with water unto repentance : but he that cometh AFTER me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear : he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."‡

But as already so much time had elapsed—year after year gliding away, and Jesus not yet appearing,—the people began to despond ; while such was the popularity of John, and so universally was he regarded as a prophet, like unto those of ancient times, and whose names were so dear to Israelites, and their annals so illustrious,—that many began to turn their attention to John, and to ask whether, after all, he was not the promised, the long expected Messiah. And just about the time when Jesus made his appearance, a deputation of priests and Levites was actually sent by the Sanhedrin from Jerusalem to ascertain this fact from himself, and to report the result of the inquiry. In the strongest manner possible, and with an inward shrinking from the very thought of such an opinion entertained, or suggestion made on the part of any, John denied it absolutely; but at the same time affirmed explicitly that he was his messenger—his witness—his appointed herald, "sent from God." He also in the same breath said that he was not Elias (Elijah) returned to the earth; nor the prophet spoken of by Moses as one whom God would raise up in the latter days; and whose words, on pain of punishment for disobedience, they were commanded to hearken unto, and strictly to obey.

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* John 1. 33. John says so expressly :—" *And I knew him not*," This was in the order of Providence ; and for reasons sufficient to the Divine mind. The fact itself cannot be gainsaid.

† John 1. 15. ‡ Matt. 3. 11.

Such was the status of John when Jesus first appeared among his people, "perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant." First of all he must honor the institution of his own appointing; and which over and above the mere rite itself, had a deeper significance, a spiritual meaning, extending to his death; and in some inexplicable way mingling water* with his blood to give the desired efficacy to the atonement he would make—the sin offering that he would bring to take away the sin of the world.

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* Hence we read, "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood." 1 John 5. 6. So, also, Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of *water* and of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3. 5.

John would fain have declined the performance of this rite in the case of Jesus, having already administered it to the thousands upon thousands that swarmed to his baptism from every part of the land. He felt, as none but he could feel, the immense disproportion, the infinite distance between him and Christ ; how then should he take upon him this holy office, administer this sacred rite, to one whose "shoes he was not worthy to bear"—who was so "mighty," and who coming after him in the order of time to do his appointed work was nevertheless "preferred before him ; for he was before him :" "his ways being from of old, even from everlasting."—How should he, who had nothing that he had not received, not even the smallest gift, perform this office for one from whose superabounding "fullness (as the primeval source of every good and perfect gift), all have received, and grace for grace."*

But at the word of Jesus, at his request made as from one man to another, assuming no superiority, maintaining his human relationship as "the man Christ Jesus," John his fore-runner, went down with him into the water, "and Jesus was baptized of John in Jordan."†

John's knowledge of Christ thus far was personal to himself. The token of recognition, secret, silent, which God had given him, was all-sufficient in itself ; answering every purpose, and removing every doubt, so far as he was personally concerned. But

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* John 1. 16. † Mark 1. 10.

God had promised him a particular SIGN from heaven, an incontestable mark, by which Jesus should publicly be made known, and authoritatively declared to be "the Son of God," the Jewish Messiah. Not in a corner was this to be done, this attestation to be given; not to John alone, but in the presence of a great multitude of people, who were silent spectators of the scene; who saw what took place, and heard what was said.

It was also quite necessary that Jesus should be declared "to be the Son of God with power;" and this was done accordingly. From the correspondence of events, the arrival of the priests and Levites from Jerusalem occurring at this particular juncture of time, we may conclude that they too were present on this occasion; so that in addition to the verbal testimony of John, they had also that of the audible voice from heaven, in a tone so loud, clear, and distinct, that all could hear, saying,—"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* These priests and Levites were cool and interested witnesses to the great sight of the opening of the heavens; and the slow descent apparently of a white winged dove upon Jesus, fluttering, hovering over and around his head, until finally it settled and remained stationary for a certain space of time upon him.

How long the amazing spectacle lasted we are not told; but from the language employed we learn that it was not a transient one, passing away like a meteor, almost as soon as seen. There was also, a radiance, a glory accompanying the descent of the dove, and investing the person of Jesus ; for what appeared in its outward form to be a white dove to human view, was neither more nor less than a visible display of the Godhead ; like the pillar of fire in the wilderness, or the golden cloud in the temple—symbol of the Divine presence. Rays of celestial brightness were there we may be sure—glittering corruscations, more dazzling than the sun. For when does God manifest himself to man without visible token similar to what Moses saw in the desert and on the mount—Isaiah in the temple, and Ezekiel by the river Chebar. But of all that had been seen in the past, there had been nothing like this ; no occasion so important. Never before had heaven and earth come so near together ; never was the veil that separates the invisible from the visible so thin, so transparent, even as gauze : nay, was it not wholly drawn aside when one from the skies, an inhabitant of another world, stepped forth from behind the dark curtain of time, and with the radiance of eternity thrown about his person, was seen upon the stage of our world, mingling among men in familiar intercourse ; and giving to man a dignity, a splendor of character, second only to that of the great God himself.

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* Matt. 3. 17.

But at last the spectacle slowly faded away ; the glory by little and little departed, waxed dimmer and dimmer—as die away the last faint rays of departing day—all the rich colouring of the setting sun, the splendor of the golden clouds, vanishing away with the swift approach of night.

CHAPTER III.

THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN CONCERNING JESUS AS A SUFFERING MESSIAH.

Of all things it was essential, absolutely so, of a witness such as John the Baptist, who "came for a witness to bear witness of the light," that he should understand from the very first the nature of the sacrificial relation which Messiah would sustain to our world. Prophets understood this. David, when he prophesied of Christ, referring to his resurrection from the dead, said, "I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee."* Isaiah, also, when he said, "I will give you the sure mercies of David:"† thus foretelling so long before the same glorious event, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead on the third day, "now no more to see corruption." Simeon, among the living witnesses to the birth of Christ, understood the manner of Christ's death when he said to Mary his mother; "Yea a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also ;"* and Anna, also, when upon the presentation of the young child in the temple she "spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Israel."†

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* Psa. 2. 7. Compare with this Acts 13, 32, 33. The two verses here referred to read as follows: "And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee."

* Compare Isa. 55. 3. with Acts 13. 34.

But John the Baptist, having the greatest part to perform in this sublime tragedy, honored more than they all from coming in such direct contact with Christ, sustaining the high office of his standard bearer, the herald announcing the near approach of Messiah, we may be sure was not left in ignorance of what was so absolutely essential to the right performance of his mission (to use the words of Simeon) that the Messiah whom he proclaimed was to be "a sign which shall be spoken against ; that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."‡ He knew before the thorny path Jesus was to tread—the death he would die ; while at the same time, having, according to the words of the angel, been "filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb," he could testify of Jesus that he was "above all ;"—that "coming from heaven he was above all."§

What has just been said was necessary to give point and force to the declaration—unintelligible to the Jews at the time—made by Christ's forerunner the next day when he pointed to Jesus as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."‖

After the scene of the baptism, Jesus left the ground, and took up his abode for the night in a neighboring village or town. There were, in these days, many villages and towns, and even cities, in that vicinity.

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* Luke 2. 33. † Luke 2. 38. ‡ Luke 2. 34, 35.
§ John 3. 31. ‖ John 1. 29

Where Jesus was baptized was a placeof passage from one side of the river to the other. Archelaus had built not long before a city called Phasaelis, after his father's so called brother. He had also repaired the palace at Jericho which had been destroyed, burnt with fire, during the disturbances that took place after the death of Herod the Great, and before Archelaus was established in his kingdom. There was a town or city of no small pretensions, which Josephus calls Batharamtha; this had suffered from the wanton spoliation that devastated nearly every part of the land during the interregnum ; but Archelaus had restored and beautified this city, and rebuilt the royal palaces that had been burnt down. Besides these larger cities or towns, there were also numerous villages along the Jordan which gave life and animation to the valley ;—all of these were not remote from the place of John's baptism. It was in one of the villages, not far from the wide and grassy plain where the multitude assembled to listen to John, that Jesus retired for the night,—lodging most probably under some plain and humble roof.

Meanwhile the multitude, for the most part, slept in the open air, and upon the ground ; their mantles were their covering ; and sweet was their sleep.—The bustle of the day was over—silence reigned throughout the plain. Watch fires burned here and there, and groups of men slept around them. For though the vintage was just over, the chill of night was felt as morning approached. No doubt many resorted to the neighboring villages, while those that lived in the vicinity returned home : but the greater part of those from distant parts of the land were glad to rest, lying down on the grass, under the warm open sky, breathing the perfumed air that swept along the valley.

What thoughts occupied their minds ! The scene of the day passed vividly before them. We may be sure this was so ; for they were Jews ; they believed in John ; they had received him as a prophet of the Most High ; great numbers had accepted the ordinance of baptism, this sacred rite, confessing their sins, and bringing forth fruits meet for repentance. And yet in open day, One, other than John,—a stranger, unknown, unheard of before, had been proclaimed in the hearing of all, by a voice from heaven and attested by a visible sign, as their Messiah. And John himself, by his baptism on that day in the Jordan, had tacitly recognized and acknowledged Jesus as such.

Revolving these things in their minds—wondering whereunto they would grow—what the issue would be,—they had much to think of, ere sleep overtook them, and another day broke upon their waking eyes. They rose, undoubtedly, with high expectations, for the guise in which Messiah was presented to them was calculated to dash their hopes. They had forgotten, or not understood that scripture which had spoken of him as "a root out of dry ground,"* and little thought they, that by their cool, disheartening reception of Christ, they were accomplishing literally, the very words of that prophecy which said, "when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him."* The daughter of Zion did not remember those words of the prophet describing how her King would first appear to her; not in the grandeur of earthly sovereignty,—not as sitting on an ivory throne, as did Solomon; not at the head of armies, with swords and spears, and waving banners, as king David; but in quite another form, as "meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass."† They had misconceived the purport of prophecy: and fixing their eyes intently on the latter day glory, they had overlooked the road to Calvary; the rugged steps, the thorny way, that preceded the day of triumph—the final victory, the ultimate conquest of the Lamb. With their minds thus pre-occupied, their views thus wrongly bent, they were but little prepared for the grand event of the following day.

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* Isa. 53. 2.

Almost with the first tinge of glimmering day, as is the case in that eastern clime, all were soon astir; and as the sun rose high above the hills of the valley sending his glistening rays o'er the dewy plain, amid song, and prayer, and cheerful greetings, the multitude met once more; their interest deepens; all eager (as we may well suppose) to hear the words of John, and see what further light he might throw upon the strange occurrences of the preceding day. Their vision was blurred, their minds at sea, doubt and fear blended with curiosity; but fondly trusting in John, they hoped he would dispel their fears, remove their doubts, and show them their King in an attitude that would not belie their expectation, nor weaken their faith in John as a messenger from heaven.

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* Isa. 53. 2. † Compare Zach. 9. 9.

The next day, Christ leaving the house where he had spent the night, with the early morn returned to the ground where John was, and the people with him; and, from what had taken place the preceding day, it could not well be otherwise but that the excitement among the people was very great, the interest most intense. For two years and a half John had proclaimed his coming; had announced himself as his herald, fore-runner; and now Messiah had appeared! He stood among them; and had fndeed mingled in the mixed crowd for a time unknown to them,* nothing in his outward demeanor, or following, attracting their attention or commanding their respect.

Herod Antipas, had, at different times, visited the scene of John's labors, drawn to the spot by his reputation as a prophet; but he came with the pomp of a king; accompanied by his courtiers, and the officers of his household. All eyes were upon him and his gay cavalcade and gorgeous retinue; but Jesus, the Lord's Christ, came unattended; walking alone; known only to John; but distinguished no doubt as no other man ever was, by a certain indescribable majesty, and an indefinable serenity of look and expression, which like Grecian sculpture, or the temples of that land of art, grew ever upon the beholder as he surveyed the beauty, skill and harmony which exalted them to the highest rank of excellence. Still until Jesus was baptized by John, he drew not on him all eyes, though there may have been those who were struck with the singular beauty and presence of this stranger, standing alone, moving about unaccompanied amidst the crowd. But this morning, on this notable day, the day after his baptism, all this was changed. In the course of the day, John attesting what had occurred immediately after the baptism, pointed to Jesus, in the presence of them all as the Messiah. His testimony was clear and direct, absolute and unqualified: "This is he of whom I said, after me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not; but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water."*

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* John 1. 26.

In the absence of all outward evidence, so far as the pomp and circumstance of kingly dignity was concerned, John, like all the witnesses that preceded him, received Jesus as the true Messiah; as the one whose coming he had previously announced. When he came as he did "meek and lowly," his faith was not staggered; he did not modify his testimony to suit present appearances, or to propitiate the favor of his countrymen, or meet their prejudices half way, but as strongly, nay more so than before stood to his word; "and I saw," he says, "and bare record that this is the Son of God."†

Like those who testified to the birth of Christ John was filled with joy; one mind animating them all ; "one faith, one Lord one baptism,"—(that of the Holy Ghost) common to them all. John viewing Christ, seeing him on the ground, pointing him out to others, giving way to him, retiring before him, received from this source his greatest joy. The chief wish of his heart and desire of his life was now accomplished. He thus expressed the joy, the gladness that filled and overflowed his humble, thankful heart : " He that hath the bride is the bridegroom ; but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice : this my joy therefore is fulfilled.[†] Is his faith shaken in the least ? does the shadow of a doubt rest upon it ? Is it not perfect ? Could language be more outspoken ?

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* John 1. 30, 31. † John 1. 34.

While all meditate upon his words,—while the crowd moving to and fro, anxious, sad, misdoubting, for the most part unprepared for such testimony, for a declaration so little in consonance with their views and feelings, so little like what they had looked for, and fondly but vainly hoped,—John, in the true spirit of his mission, and as one by an act of faith baptized into the death of Christ, and understanding full well the purport of his own words, pointed to Jesus in his sacrificial character, as "the propitiation for the sins of the whole world."[*] "Behold," he said, "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."[†]

Truly were these words—written afterward—made good : " He came unto his own, and his own received him not."* At first, and for a time there was not a single response,—not one stepped forth from among those that were present and heard the words of John, to take his stand by Christ, to enrol himself as a follower of this new "Leader and Commander of the people." All kept aloof. Even the words of one so highly venerated as John—who was universally regarded as a prophet,—made no impression. They fell upon ears that were closed; ears that were sealed; and hearts that did not, we may say, that could not understand.

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[*] John 3. 31. [†] John 1. 2. [‡] John 1. 29.

Nothing was so far from the conception of the ordinary Jewish mind as the death of Christ. Those witnesses of whom we have spoken, with John, were the rare exceptions, and stand forth as bright and shining lights amidst the surrounding darkness. John himself had many sincere disciples; they were tenderly attached to him; but among the number not one comprehended his words, or received Jesus.

Thus the day wore away; and at nightfall Jesus left the ground; and solitary, sad, returned to the village where for the present he abode. We say "sad;"—is it very hard to conceive of this, when we remember his life, as after events showed how his bosom swelled with others' woe; how his eyes filled with tears; how he "wept" as he so clearly foresaw and foretold the swiftly approaching doom of Jerusalem. Was ever a father's bosom more moved over the fate of a rebellious and wayward child?—"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."*

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* John 1. 11.

So Jesus, in the tenderness of his love, foreseeing in the general unbelief of the people the first speck of that dark cloud which would overwhelm the nation by their rejection of him, perceiving the nullity of John's testimony, how little it availed, returned to the village, saddened, sighing, burdened, mourning over their unbelief, and doubtless spending the greater part of the night in prayer in behalf of those whom he loved so well; while sorrow and sadness spread itself also over the mind of John on account of the hardness and unbelief of the people, and their rejection of his testimony.

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* Matt. 23. 37. Luke 13. 33.

CHAPTER IV

SCENE ON THE BANKS OF THE JORDAN CLOSES:— SIX OF THE DISCIPLES OF JOHN ATTACH THEMSELVES TO CHRIST.

THE next day Jesus appeared on the ground again; and as he passed along, still alone, John his fore-runner was standing with two of his disciples, apart, just then, it would seem, from the multitude. The names of these two disciples were John and Andrew; they were fishermen; and their residence was in Capernaum, on the shore of the Lake of Galilee. They had been baptized with John's baptism; had obtained the knowledge of the remission of sins; and, instructed by John, were, with the rest, looking for the appearance of the Messiah. They were among those who had heard John repeatedly say, with strong emphasis, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."* These words of John sounded strange in their ears; this baptism of

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Matt. 3. 11, 12.

the Holy Ghost, in contradistinction to the baptism of John, they knew not what it meant. It consequently made no clear, distinct impression on their minds ; and yet it evidently was of great importance. John placed the utmost stress on it ; his words were most weighty and significant ; and set forth the divine character of the Messiah in the strongest light. The baptism of John, though from heaven, would not bear comparison with that which they would receive from Jesus ; while John himself, though a prophet of the Lord, "sent from God," was small and insignificant beside Christ, whose greatness, dignity, might, and power, no language could express ; while John "was not worthy to bear his shoes." One was "from above ;" the other "of the earth earthly."* But what so deeply impressed John, taking such hold of his soul and affections,—filling him with joy, and calling into play his warmest love, exciting awe and a holy reverence—did not move his disciples. But on this memorable day, as Jesus walked slowly along, pensive, sad, silent, John specially directed the attention of the two disciples, (Andrew and John) to Christ, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God."† This time not in vain, as it led to a personal knowledge of Christ, with whom they spent the rest of the day, and probably abode under the same roof with him that night.

The sun was fast declining, its shadows lengthening over the plain ; as Jesus, in company with John, called afterward "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, so renowned in the history of the Church, left the ground for some neighboring village, the name unknown, and no trace of it left, or record of the favored family with whom Jesus made his temporary home. It is easy to gather from the result, from the conclusion to which these two disciples came, in the course of that interview, how the time was spent, and the pains Jesus took to satisfy them that he was the Messiah. He opened to their understanding the Scriptures, and showed how they testified of him. What John could not do, Jesus did. We do not mean to say that the whole was revealed; or that at this time they understood in what sense Jesus was called "the Lamb of God:" not until the Holy Ghost was given did they comprehend the deep import, the spiritual significance of these all-potent words. But the result of the interview, and the discourse of Christ (allowing also for the testimony of John) fully satisfied them that Jesus was the Christ. It was the first step in the way the holy prophets went;—the beginning of the revelation of Jesus Christ to them; they basked in this sunlight: hence, on the following day, having returned to the ground, Andrew sought out his brother, and finding him, at once said, "We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ."*

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* John 3. 31. † John 1. 36.

We can conceive of the process by which they arrived at this conviction from their discourse with Christ; of his reference to the seventy weeks of

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* John 1. 41.

Daniel as fixing thereby the actual time of the appearance of the Messiah the Prince "from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem;"* and that according to the exactest computation this period had now at last fully arrived. That at this very moment they were already in the middle of the seventieth week of this prophecy; John's ministry and baptism covering the first half of this remarkable week, and the three years and a half of Christ's public ministry and labors closing it. We may trace him, also, as carrying them back to Bethlehem, reciting all the wonderful occurrences of his birth, showing the relation which subsisted between him and John, and thus, step by step, leading them through the medium of the understanding, and the force of testimony, to the important conclusion that Jesus was, as they testified the next day, "the Messias."

It is likely chords were touched in their memory; for from their age the strange things that were bruited abroad some thirty years before, and which they heard when they were young, or which were related to them by those who were living at the time, could hardly fail to be revived afresh in their minds, aided by what they now saw and heard for themselves. All combined, with various other circumstances and proofs, to produce a strong impression, and induce them to accept the testimony of John, corroborated by this eventful interview with Christ. What they now learned, remained a conviction for life;—they never departed from the profession they now made; and were ever after faithful servants and followers of Jesus.

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* Daniel 9. 25.

As a stream breaking forth at its source soon grows in volume by the additions made to it as it flows along; as a break in a dam swiftly widens when the first breach is made, however small, so the accession of John and Andrew to Christ was soon followed by that of others. But these two stand at the head of the illustrious roll. John's teaching and baptism opened the way for them to receive the teachings of Christ,—to acknowledge him as the Messiah the Prince; and at once to avow their adhesion to his cause. Before the day had expired Andrew sought out his brother Simon, a fisherman like himself,—communicated to him the joyful tidings, and brought him to Christ.

By intuition, by his knowledge of what was in man, Jesus anticipated any action on the part of Simon. Foreseeing the great part he was to act, understanding well the nobleness of Simon's character,—the warmth of his heart, the kindling energy of his soul,—his genuine unadulterated nature, Christ at once, ere Simon spoke, surnamed him Peter. Thus at once was Simon enrolled as the third on the list of the followers of their new found Messiah. A warmer heart, more loving and true was never gained to any cause; and even his fall and errors did but tend to bring forth those qualities of love and of tenderness which so shone forth in his character.

Quickly as Simon resolved, he acted not without forethought and knowledge. He, also, was a disciple of John, and had learned of him. There can be little or no doubt but that he had been impressed by the testimony of John, prior to his interview with our Lord. He had also seen his brother; and in all likelihood Andrew 'had rehearsed all that Christ had said—going over the whole ground, so that already before he came to Christ he was convinced, and ready to avow his belief.

Such was the issue of the second day;—three of John's disciples were added to Christ,—John, Andrew and Simon, surnamed Peter. Peter, the so-called corner-stone in the future upbuilding of the Romish hierarchy, whose traditions and the superstructure of ages, with all their immense results, are thus here traced to this apparently small beginning in his joining the new found Messiah. The movement of Peter and the other disciples thus far, however, was not much observed,—the multitude had their attention absorbed by John; though perhaps his testimony was weakened in many minds by his presentation of Jesus as the Messiah. Perhaps from this culminating point his popularity began to decline, and John to "decrease," while Christ "increased." This left him more exposed to the attacks of his enemies, so that not very long after, say some six months, he fell into their hands.

And now another of these memorable days had come,—each day a marked epoch in the history of time,—on which was turning as on an axle, in very truth, the destiny of the world. There was this peculiarity in the case of Philip, on this day, that without the intervention of any one, Christ of his own accord added him to the number of his disciples. There is a reason for this in the intimacy that subsisted between Andrew, already chosen, and Philip, apart from the act of Christ himself;—one was a pledge for the other;—their mutual friendship showed a oneness of spirit, and a harmony of action, which would be conducive to a cause in which both were enlisted. Beside Jesus saw in Philip the qualifications needed for the high office he would sustain; and which indeed he worthily filled to the very last.*

Andrew, also, in this case as in that of his brother, as we may naturally suppose, did not withhold from so dear a friend as Philip his interview with Christ; and his conviction, with the reasons for it, that Jesus was the "Messias." When Jesus therefore saw Philip and said simply unto him, "Follow me,"† like Peter he was ready at a word to obey, and he at once joined himself to the little band,—now four in number.

But the day was not yet over; and though Jesus was to leave the ground on this day, the time of his departure had not yet arrived. There was yet another accession to be made to the company of disciples. While these things were passing, one of the disciples of John, Nathaniel (of Cana of Galilee), had withdrawn from the crowd, and sought privacy in a distant sequestered spot. It was probably a favorite place of retirement to which he often resorted, sometimes alone, sometimes in company; otherwise Philip would not have found him so readily. He appears to have gone directly to the spot. He had not, as is evident from his address, seen Nathaniel since his own new born convictions, since the joyful hour he had found the "Messias." Jesus is about to leave,—he hastens to bring Nathaniel to him. His first glad words,—no words more important were ever uttered,—were "we have found him of whom Moses, in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."*

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* We find Philip and Andrew working together, keeping close to each other, at a late period in our Lord's ministry. See John 12. 21, 22. Beside they were both from the same city (John 1. 44.) and were probably companions in early life, friends in youth, and now in riper years.

† John 1. 43.

"Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." What did this mean? How could this be? How could the Messiah proceed from Galilee? From Nazareth of Galilee? This is what stumbled Nathaniel. He was too well read in Scriptures not to know that "Christ cometh of the seed of David," as we have seen, how then could he be of the city of Nazareth? "and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was."† Hence he says to Philip, putting it in the form of a question, "Can any good thing," or as it reads in Jeremiah,—"that good thing,"‡ (the promised Mes-

NOTE.—Whoever will take the pains to read the thirty-third chapter of Jeremiah, will find that there is hardly a chapter in the Bible fuller of explicit reference to Christ than this; and of the "praise and honor" that will yet come to the Jews through Christ: and who is here spoken of as "the Branch of righteousness." In the course of the chapter, in the 14th and 15th verses, we have these words: "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will perform *that good thing* which I have promised unto siah),—"come out of Nazareth," a town of Galilee, from whence "ariseth no prophet."* There was but one thought uppermost in the mind of Nathaniel at the time,—that of Christ. Of him he was thinking; for his coming he was looking. Nothing was farther from his mind than Nazareth as a town or village, or anything appertaining to it. Absorbed in Christ, versed in the Scripture, when he hears from his friend what is so contradictory on the face of it, he simply asks Philip, "How can Christ come from Nazareth?" How can he be, as you say, from Nazareth, when Bethlehem according to Micah is to be his birth-place? His question Philip does not undertake to answer, or his doubts to remove; but simply says, "Come and see."†

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* John 1. 45. † John 7. 42. ‡ Jer. 33. 14.

The result we all know. He was soon convinced and made the following remarkable acknowledgement: "Rabbi, thou art the son of God: thou art the King of Israel."‡ Nathaniel, ere he was found of Philip, was seated in some remote, secluded spot, so far from where Jesus was, so impervious, so completely hidden, owing to the distance, and the nature of his retreat, and the impossibility of communication through any mere human channel, that when Jesus said, "Before that Philip called unto thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw

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the house of Israel, and to the house of Judah. In those days and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land."

* John 7. 42. † John 1. 46. ‡ John 1. 49.

thee,"* he was fully satisfied that no eye but that of One who "seeth in secret," could have detected the place of his concealment, and revealed it unto him. The open, ingenuous mind of Nathaniel, at once saw in the knowledge of Christ evidence of preternatural vision ; his doubts were removed, his questions all answered, by such an act of omniscience.

There was doubtless, an aggregation of circumstances, a great variety of particulars, present to the chief actor in the scene, the one on whom it made so deep an impression, and whose course of life it decided, which tended to strengthen at the time his belief, and to lead to the bold, unequivocal avowal which he made of faith in Christ. No selfish motives had any weight with him ; no ulterior ends governed his action ; no wild enthusiasm clouded his judgment. He was a true Israelite, "waiting for the kingdom of God :" a student of Scripture, and prepared by his acquaintance with prophecy to come to the conclusion he did. But his mind rose to a greater height than the rest ; his vision was larger, more unconfined. He salutes Jesus not only as the Son of God, but "the King of Israel." As David's seed, he seats him on his throne, giving him his true title, a title in the Old Testament given to Christ, "many a time and oft," as rightful "Lord of all."

That Nathaniel, however, under this appellation, at this time, before the coming of the Holy Ghost, comprehended, in all its breadth and depth, the divine character of Christ, we do not suppose. The time for this higher revelation had not yet come. Nevertheless his faith in Jesus as the Messiah, and as such the King of the Jews, like that of the Magi, was perfect ; and drew down upon him from Christ a special benediction.

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* John 1. 48.

Drawing aside the veil from the future—looking forward to the glory that would follow from his death and resurrection, Jesus points him to the day when his essential divinity would be made known ; when the great fact would be established that Jesus was in very deed "God manifested in the flesh." To this, as we conceive, reference is made in the following words, (for what can be greater than God actually "dwelling" in the person of Jesus "among us,") when Christ thus addressed Nathaniel, pleased with the promptitude and boldness of his profession of faith : "Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou ? thou shalt see greater things than these. Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

After these things our Lord left the Jordan, and his temporary home in this vicinity, with his five disciples ; the time having arrived for his own shewing unto Israel as the Messiah the Prince.

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* John I. 50, 51.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRIAL SCENE IN THE WILDERNESS OF JUDEA.

WHAT we have now to narrate took place probably before the events just recited; but as the strangest scene in all this eventful history,—standing by itself, alone, disconnected,—like a solitary column in a desert, we will speak of it here.

The wonderful manifestation which almost immediately followed the baptism of our Lord in the Jordan—the glory that crowned him there—the radiance with which he was encircled—the burst of light that flashed from the skies, and partially revealed the innermost sanctuary of the heavenly world, (as when the veil was partially drawn aside to admit once a year the high priest to enter the Holy of Holies,) was succeeded by a night of darkness, by a withdrawal to the wilderness of Judea,—by a long period of loneliness and wandering to and fro in the desert; with no other company than wild beasts, and the mute stones which environed him around on every hand.

Forty days and nights were passed here without food, as was the case with Moses and Elijah, in the years that were past under the two former dispensations, (that of the Mosaic and the prophetical,) in the stony desert of Sinai. In the case of Jesus there was no such absolute necessity as existed with Moses and Elijah of so long a sojourn in the wilderness without food or companionship; but inasmuch as it "behooved him" while tabernacling in the flesh, "to be in all things like unto the brethren," to subject himself to all the trials and temptations incident to the flesh, he submitted, as in his baptism, to undergo all that these men of God had in their day; to pass through the same spiritual conflicts, to enter the arena, and to contend with the grand adversary of man, assisted by all the powers of darkness, as they had done. A new champion had now entered the lists; not Moses nor Elijah, but Jesus "the Son of God," as declared by a voice from heaven, at the time of his baptism.

Summoned anew to a fresh conflict, Satan appears ready for the fight. In a measure he had worsted both Moses and Elijah; their faith had in part failed; one at the waters of Meribah; the other before the wrath of Jezebel: though the enemy had them under his feet but a short time. In this contest all the surrounding circumstances favor Satan; the lonely wilderness; the absence of all human sympathy or aid; the exposure to the dark fancies that solitude so unbroken and unrelieved often engenders;* the weakness and impatience which arise from hunger, all conspired to aid the Evil One.

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* See the case of Rousseau in the Hermitage as stated by Morley in his Life of that remarkable man; justly deemed so despite all his vagaries and misdeeds that make him at times an object of disgust and abhorrence.

From the manner in which he addresses Christ, we know that he assailed him not merely as a prophet, like Moses or Elijah, but as Jesus the "Son of God," whatever that might imply. Not unprepared, therefore, was he for a contest with one whose title was such as had never been claimed by mortal man before. We must not be surprised at the boldness of the attack, for had not Satan declared open war with the Most High from the beginning, and, with his angels, fought against him, until overcome by superior power. But it is not by force, but by craft, he expects now to prevail. None yet has successfully, and to the fullest extent contended with him; he has never failed to find some weak place in the armor of the mightiest champions for God and right.

The first man Adam fell a comparatively easy prey to the Tempter's "wiles;" though doubtless the resistance was much greater, and more protracted than appears on the surface. One does not fall from such a dazzling height as that on which Adam stood without a long struggle and a hard fight, even though conquered at last. The very nature of the case would suggest this; for one armed with the strength that God supplies is not easily vanquished; nor were Moses and Elijah easily overcome; as it was their unbelief was but momentary, and after great resistance, under the most trying and disheartening circumstances.

How is it to be now? It is a moral struggle,—a contest between light and darkness, evil and good, faith and unbelief. Force, physical strength, does not enter into the issue at all. Satan tried this once, but it was of no avail. It was by his superior sagacity, the force of reasoning, at the same time enlisting certain passions which were latent in our first parents, and which he knew how to reach and inflame, that he eventually succeeded. What will be his course with this "second Adam," who indeed in human guise is no other than "the Lord from heaven?"

Of course, to us, the issue is not doubtful. But possibly the divinity that dwelt within—the "fulness of the Godhead,"—was not then present to his mind. At the most, Jesus was not, as we conceive, in the apprehension of Satan, God, but "the Son of God." Divine, certainly, as to his human nature, in a certain sense, and to a certain extent, but not full orbed—the unoriginated Jehovah. This was beyond even unfallen angelic knowledge; much less the ken of Satan. The times of this revelation to angels and men God reserved to himself; and the deep mystery lay as yet wrapped in the bosom of eternity, save to certain witnesses to whom it had been made known by an express revelation from heaven.

The strangest thing in this conflict is, that all turned, victory or failure, on a single point—faith in God, and obedience to the Divine law in its spirit and letter, that flows so easily and naturally from this source. This is the secret source, the fountainhead from whence flows through a thousand hidden channels, all that belongs to good, or all that is evil, according as we receive or reject God; according as we believe or disbelieve the testimony of the word of God. This was the ground on which Jesus stood ; and this was the issue at stake.

It was so in the beginning with Adam ;—all turned upon his faith whether he would be victorious or not. His unbelief was the opening of Pandora's box. Not the origin of evil, but the fruitful source of all our woe ;—the introduction of sin and death into our world with "loss of Eden, till one greater Man restore us and regain the blissful seat."* If any one speaks of this as a great mystery, and as wholly out of the wide range of reason,—as something beyond human reach, baffling the wisdom of men of the profoundest minds,—we admit it, and reply in the words of God, (spoken with express reference to this very subject) "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him ? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding ?"†

It was not until the expiration of forty days that the arch deceiver presented himself to Christ, as he had previously done to Eve, "the mother of all living," in the garden of Eden. In what guise "the tempter came to him," we know not ; but he spoke and acted as a man ; and we are to receive the account as it reads, as we would that of any other every day transaction. To do otherwise would be to vitiate the narration ; to destroy its effect ; precisely the same as an attempt to allegorize the scene in the garden; the existence of Satan, and the trial of the fidelity of our first parents, with their fall and consequent punishment, nad all the deplorable consequences following thereon,—would throw the historical account of the first tempation into the region of fable,—undermining thus at a single stroke the foundation on which rests the whole fabric of divine revelation. Take this away,—reason it into a myth or fable, and the whole building falls. If the one is real and true, so is the other; they stand or fall together.

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* Milton's Paradise Lost. † Isa. 40. 13, 14.

What transpired during the previous forty days and forty nights, save that Jesus "fasted," we are not told; but we can form some conception from the nature of his mission to our world. He came on a mission of mercy and salvation,—an errand of love. According to their measure, and within the circle of their comparatively narrow sphere, the Jewish prophets stood in the same relation to their nation; they sought to be its saviour; to keep the people from going down into the pit of national ruin by their tears, their earnest and impassioned expostulations. Their solicitude was great, too great to be told. They lost sight of self; of their own ease and comfort, in their deep concern for the welfare of their people. Their bosoms swelled with emotion; their souls melted into the tenderest compassion: and in the spirit of a true patriotism, such as they felt, and by which they were animated, they were ever ready if need be to sacrifice their lives, and all they held dear, for the good of their country. "Rivers of tears," said David, "run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law." The prophet Jeremiah thus gives vent to the grief of his overburthened heart : "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people."* Thus with Christ. He came to save a world,—"to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound ;" to bring in the year of jubilee ; "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord"† to a ransomed race : and he was now alone in the wilderness—with wild beasts as his companions,—passing through a state of mental trial and agonizing conflict, (similar to what all the prophets had in their measure endured) as a preparation for his work, and, speaking after the manner of men, to obtain assurance of his success, and power from on high to effect it. Here he sharpened his weapons, girded on his armor, tried the strength of his sword, and prepared to go forth to glorious war. Here with strong crying and tears, and groanings which could not be uttered, he made intercession for all men, for a world lying in wickedness, as the prophets of old prayed and wept for a rebellious and gainsaying people. See you not that the spirit was one and the same ; the "mind of Christ" was the mind of all. The difference of time—the intervening of centuries—the peculiarities superinduced in the lapse of ages—all went for nothing. No change of time or place, or surrounding circumstances, could make any essential change as to the spirit and manner of their work ; only Jesus, the Redeemer, "coming from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah—glorious in his apparel ; and travelling in the greatness of his strength,"* sounded depths of grief—went through agonies of soul, and bore a burden weight of woe, which none but he could bear ; and under which he would have fainted and been borne down to the dust, had it not been that the flesh, sinking and giving way under its load, had been sustained, as afterward in the garden of Gethsemane, by the ministry of angels. As he walked from day to day, unrelieved by human solace, was there any spot on which he trod that was not wet with his tears ? The night, the silent night, did it not bear witness to the cry of his heart, "Save Lord, save the people of thy heritage." It had been sold for nought, like Esau's birthright ; it must be bought back with a great price. Rash, thoughtless, wayward, unbelieving Esau, could not do it, though he sought to regain carefully with tears what he had so wantonly and wickedly lost ; but one "mighty to save" undertook the more than herculean task. He was now "treading the winepress alone ;" the year of redemption had come, the "day of vengeance" was in his heart ;† its dawning had begun—the trump of jubilee, first sounded in the bleak and desolate wilderness of Judea.

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* Jer. 9. 1. † Isaiah 61. 1, 2.

The contest, the trial of faith transferred from the garden of Eden to the desolate wilderness, is not now between the first Adam and his subtle foe ; but, as already shown, between the tempter and the second Adam. The first man stood on a lofty pin-

* Isaiah 63. 1. † Ibid. 63. 4.

nacle ; he shone with all the resplendency of the image of God ; the signet of authority was on his forehead ; he was the sole head and representative of his race ; the earth and all the inferior race was made for him ; and on his fidelity hung suspended both good and evil. But he fell ; and now Jesus comes

> ———————"To avenge
> Supplanted Adam, and by vanquishing
> Temptation, to regain lost Paradise,
> And frustrate the conquest fraudulent."*

Choosing his time Satan presents himself to Jesus in disguise ; in some assumed form,† such as he conceived best fitted for such an occasion ; an occasion calling for his deepest art, having sounded, over and over again, all the shallows as well as the deep places of our common nature. He knew full well when and where to drop his line ; what bait was most likely to take ; and however we laugh at the artifices of Satan, his countless victories from Adam down, his present as well as past dominion over our world,‡ his dark shadow, death, obedient to his will, and following him whithersoever he goes, showing his power, and giving painful proof of his actual existence, would seem to mock our laughter, deride our unbelief, and give us serious thought.

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* Paradise Regained.

† Milton, in his "Paradise Regained," represents Satan as an "aged swain :" another writer, as "disguised as a hermit." But these are only poetical fancies.

‡ Called by our Lord "the prince of this world," on three different occasions. See John 14. 30 : also 12. 31. and 16. 11.

Death surely is no laughing matter, and as long as death is our invincible foe, so long Satan rules, and remains master of the field. On the issue then of this contest hangs victory or death; let the supplanter fail, he who has robbed man of his birthright, and victory will perch on the banner of the cross, and the first fatal blow will be struck at death and sin, and the kingdom of Satan begin to totter to its final fall.†

Taking advantage of his temporary faintness and exhaustion for want of food, after so long a vigil, (as he did in the case of Esau, for there is no end of correspondences in the word of God) partaking as Jesus did of our common nature, save when he was supernaturally sustained, like Moses and Elijah, Satan assails him on this ground. Conceding his Sonship, for he does not doubt this, Satan asks Jesus for a display of his power by turning stones into bread, and so supplying his present pressing want. No doubt the need was most urgent; and nature seemed as though it must give way, life expire, and his great mission end, without immediate relief. Doubtless such was the case with Esau, and he was faint and ready to perish when in a moment of extraordinary bodily weakness and temptation he sold his birthright. Had his faith been strong, and his soul well guarded, he would have died sooner than have yielded.

Jesus met the temptation with the "sword of the

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* This is the view Milton takes of Christ's temptation in the wilderness; and consequently makes the triumph of Christ in "Paradise Regained" turn on this single point.

Spirit, which is the word of God." He did not resort to human reasoning ; he did not resist in his own strength ; he called on God for aid. What if he did die in the outset of his career ; what if he did fall by the hand of his enemy ; was not God able to maintain his own cause ? (Recollect it is as a man our Lord thus speaks.) It was "not all of life to live," neither was it "all of death to die." Could he fall at a better time, in a better cause, if God should so ordain ? When would he be true to himself if not now ? Let the world laugh ;—in such a cause, at such a time, fighting such a foe, death would be the greatest of triumphs. Rising superior to the pain of the present moment, the gnawing anguish of hunger, the faintness perhaps almost of death, he repels Satan—not by human strength, but by faith in God. "It is written," he said, "that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."* There is a higher, a more glorious, an eternal life ; and if I "suffer hunger" now, led into the wilderness by a divine hand, I fall back on something better than bread, than manna ; upon what is more enduring, even the word of God ; the "living bread which cometh down from heaven ;" and which they who eat thereof shall never die.

Failing to excite "distrust" in Christ, by his first insidious attack, for Satan approached Christ as he did Eve, in a pleasing way, as by the most persuasive address, he next assails him on the ground of presumption. If he cannot superinduce distrust through unbelief under suffering, he will try his faith in God from another point; and in a moment of self-elation lead him to act himself apart from God; and like Moses at the waters of Meribah, think himself something when he is nothing. For a moment Moses under the pressure of strong temptation, and in the discomfiture of his spirit, forgot himself, as we conceive, and for once, no more, failed to glory in the God of his salvation. "Shall Aaron and I bring you water out of the rock; Shall WE rebuke your mutiny, stop your murmuring, and save ourselves out of your hands by a display of our strength, and the miraculous power we possess? Rebels, look at us!"

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* Deut 8. 3. Luke 4. 4.

God cannot bear the slightest self-assumption. He will not give his "glory" to another. God must necessarily be all and in all; as he is head of all, and all derive their being from him. What are we without him? The least self-sufficiency impinges on his government; and if allowed would weaken and overturn it. Eternal stability depends on the complete subjection of the will of the creature to the Creator. This has nothing slavish in it; does not detract from the true dignity of man; and when in right exercise, as in the case of the Son and the Father, elevates instead of lowers. Should Satan elicit any spark of self-sufficiency in the Son, as apart from the Father, he will have gained a victory, and his cause will be triumphant.

As he could not excite "distrust" in the Son of Man can he not inspire him with a feeling of daring presumption, and thus lead him to arrogate to himself a measure of that strength, that glory, which belongs to God only. These fine issues of the soul are difficult to follow; and like the trail of a serpent on a rock are hard to be traced; but they exist nevertheless, and belong legitimately to "the deep things of God."

The course that Satan took on this occasion is most extraordinary; and we must not place his line of action in the realm of fancy, but among the things that are. He carried our Saviour,—and this must be understood in a literal, not an allegorical sense, and placed him on the top of the pinnacle of the temple, in the holy city Jerusalem.* Thus was it with the prophet Ezekiel, when "the form of an hand, took him by the lock of his hair, and the Spirit of God lifted him up between the earth and the heavens," and with incredible swiftness bore him from the plains of Chaldea to Jerusalem; and then in an equally short space of time, brought him back to the place whence he started.†

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* Milton thus sketches this scene; poetry in this instance lending wings not to fancy but to truth.

> "So saying he caught him up, and without wing
> Of hippogrif bore through the air sublime
> Over the wilderness and o'er the plain;
> Till underneath them fair Jerusalem,
> The holy city, lifted high her towers,
> And higher yet the glorious temple rear'd
> Her pile, far off appearing like a mount
> Of alabaster, topp'd with golden spires;
> There on the highest pinnacle he set
> The Son of God."

Paradise Regained. Book 4, lines 541 to 550.

† Ezek.

We must not limit the power of God ; he rideth on the wings of the wind ; nay, his speed outrideth that of the swift flying wind. There is nothing that is not his creature ; and that does not obey his high behest. Satan, in this case, is but his winged messenger ; and his action is a demonstration of his power. Jesus standing on this dizzy height, overlooking a valley the bottom of which the eye could not reach, is challenged by Satan, in words mellifluous, and as if thereby he would give manifest proof of his divine mission, and so promote the end for which he had come into the world (Satan to the outward ear does not speak in mockery, but with an air of truth, and as if he fain would be fully convinced of his high calling) ; "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down : for it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee ; and in their hands shall they bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

Not succeeding at this point, neither exciting distrust on the one hand, nor presumption on the other, (for what object would be gained by casting himself down from a pinnacle of the temple into the valley below, except to gratify a feeling of vain glory) Satan comes out in a bolder shape, with the same ease as before, he takes him up into an exceeding high mountain, no matter in what quarter of the globe, and shows him imperial Rome, and the extent of her vast dominion, with the kingdoms and provinces dependent on her, with other and more distant realms, as by a panoramic display, as if a curtain had arisen, and displayed them all to view, with all earth's dazzling glory, shown under the false and fleeting hues of a vain imagination,—and offers them all to Christ (justly claiming them as his own), on condition that Christ would render allegiance to him, instead of to God the supreme Ruler of the universe. Satan himself had lost heaven under the impulse of a false pride and a vain ambition; and he imagines—otherwise the proposal would not have been made—he can gain Christ in the same way. He had been treated courteously until now, but on this proposal he receives a stern and prompt rebuff. If Eve was deceived by the glitter of the golden fruit, whatever it was, on the tree of knowledge of good and evil; if her eye was dazzled, and her imagination wrought up to its highest pitch by vain fancies and delusive day dreams, not so Christ. He rebukes Satan. He strips him of all his disguises; he shows him in his true colors: "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."*

Then Satan leaves him "for a season." Though he had lost a victory, and knew full well that this was the beginning of the end, surely presaging his final overthrow, and loss of all his conquests, knew that Jesus was about to take to him his "great power and reign;" yet he resolved to fight to the last; to hinder what he could not prevent. Satan was baffled as never before. The second Adam had stood, firmly stood, where the first Adam had fallen. This was the first of the triumphs of Jesus

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* Matt. 4. 10.

Christ to regain what man had lost; to restore the race; to bring in everlasting righteousness. On such a seemingly slender thread do all things hang, all of good and evil in our world, in the wise economy of God.

It is a question of obedience or of disobedience, (not of philosophy, nor of science), of fidelity to the truth, or recreancy; of belief or unbelief. So God ordered it. Eve did not resist; Adam disobeyed; and the curse threatened fell on our earth. Who will deny the infliction of evil, the actuality of the curse under which the whole earth continually groans. Are there any that are free from its effects? Where are they to be found? In what part of the habitable globe? All the earth has been ransacked, but the same sad tale is borne on every wind; and all alike reel and stagger under the same dreadful blow. It is not simply the eating of an apple, as some say. This in itself is a little thing, though it carries with it none of the deep significancy belonging to a tree the partaking of whose fruit comprised a knowledge of evil as contradistinguished from good, which up to that hour our first parents had not known. The act was one of wilful disobedience to the express command of God; and contained in it the seeds of all evil. It was by a single act of disobedience Satan fell. The consequences of the lapse, in both cases, show the importance that God attaches to it; what an evil and bitter thing it is to sin against God; and how if sin be not met and checked in some suitable way, worthy of God, and magnifying his holy law, it would overturn the Divine government.

But Christ comes in, and his obedience is set over against the disobedience of Adam, and ultimately evil, after it has fully shown itself in all its most dreadful forms for a sufficient length of time to answer the Divine purpose in its permission, will be overruled for good. God "will assert his eternal providence," in his own good time, "and vindicate his ways to man." Let none doubt of this. He who overthrew Pharaoh and his hosts in the Red Sea, will stand by his own word; rebuke his foes; confound all their calculations; show the folly of the overwise, and re-awaken the song of triumph as sung of old on the shore of the Red Sea: "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation; he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is his name. The Lord shall reign for ever and ever."*

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* Exod. 15. 1, 2, 3, 18.

BOOK THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

THE RETURN TO GALILEE.

"That word ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, *and began from Galilee*, after the baptism which Jesus preached."*

HAVING received the public testimony of John after his baptism on the banks of the Jordan, in the midst of the people assembled at the trumpet call of his forerunner, that Jesus the Son of Man was the Christ, having passed victoriously through the fiery ordeal of the wilderness,† Jesus returns "full of the Holy Ghost," "in the power of the Spirit," to his native Galilee. He had left it but a short time before, as summer was waning, after so many years spent in seclusion in the humble village of Nazareth, in the society of his reputed brothers and sisters (for these had been born under the same roof, after the return from Egypt) unknown beyond the narrow circle of home, and his native village, and now he returns (we quote the passage once more) "travelling in the greatness of his strength," his raiment already stained and his garments sprinkled with blood from the force of his inward conflicts and agonizing cries in the wilderness, acknowledged before the people by John as their long expected Messiah ; not alone, but accompanied by five chosen disciples who had cast in their lot with him ; and in the absence of any miracle as yet, had one by one, each for himself, acknowledged Jesus to be "him of whom Moses in the law" and all the prophets had expressly written. Nathaniel in the fullness of his faith and love, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, had saluted him with those glorious and far-reaching words, so remarkable as spoken at that particular junction of time, and when there was so little outward demonstration to warrant them, "Rabbi," (we repeat them), "thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel."

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* Acts 10. 37.

† The reader is referred to Rom. 5. 14—21. as showing what the first Adam lost, and the second Adam gained; Satan the vanquisher in the one case—but overcome in his contest with Christ.

Thus crowned as with laurel, like a victor returning from the Olympian games, Jesus comes back to the scenes of his boyhood and early life. He had waited his full time ; he had not gone before he was sent. God cannot be hurried any more than seed time and harvest. The sequence of events must follow in regular order according to the plan or arrangement in the Divine mind. The years passed in seclusion and seeming inactivity were not wasted ; they were as operative in their way as those of active exertion. The sun that ripens is seen and felt as much in the incipient stage as when the fruit is attaining its maturity, as much in the seed and blossom as in the full blown flower. Not a moment of our Lord's time on earth was lost. Not that of his birth, nor the period of childhood, or any of his earlier years; all entered into the great and unspeakable work of the redemption of the world.

Thus Moses spent forty years in the silence of the desert; following from day to day the monotonous and uneventful life of a shepherd, ere God called him forth from his obscurity for the deliverance of his people, though he had been pre-appointed to that work from his birth. Twenty-five years passed away from the time of the promise given to Abraham before Isaac was born. Were these years all lost to the world because the promise remained so long unfulfilled? The Israelites remained some two hundred years in hard bondage before the hour of deliverance came. Was this long period vainly spent? Did not its lessons reach far down the stream of time?

It is a peculiarity of the Gospel dispensation that we must wait God's time; and one of the most remarkable passages of Isaiah, recognizes this striking fact, and gives it a coloring little suited to the natural impetuosity of human action: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: HE THAT BELIEVETH SHALL NOT MAKE HASTE."* God, with whom "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day;"† with whom "a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night,"* must have time in his immense theatre, and on a stage so large, where scenes so astonishing and so varied follow each other in endless succession ; where the great drama of the mystery of life and of death is to be evolved ; where the manifold riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God are to be unfolded, "that he may do his work, his strange work ; and bring to pass his act, his strange act."†

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* Isa. 38. 16. † 2 Peter 3. 8.

Thus Jesus, the world's Saviour and Redeemer, "a prophet like unto Moses," from the greatness of his works, the eminence of his character, combining both the legislative and prophetical characteristics of the Jewish lawgiver ; and infinitely his superior in his priestly office,—shrouds himself in obscurity, makes no sign until the hour arrives, "the set time" to favor Israel and begin his work. Until then Nazareth concealed his glory ;—the sun that was to illumine the world with his far darting rays was hidden from sight. The humble home of Joseph and Mary contained one so great, so high and lofty, yet so lowly. He slept under its roof ; he stept over its threshhold ; he sat down under its shade ; he partook of the food spread upon its plain and simple board. He was its inmate for many long revolving years, covering at least the space of a quarter of a century. And all this while the world he came to save, like a shepherd seeking the lost sheep that had strayed into the wilderness, lay covered with darkness and sunk in sin. But now that the time has fully arrived to make known his great commission, he "rises up as in mount Perezim,"* as David, who "broke not forth upon his enemies, as the breach of waters, until he heard a sound of going in the tops of the mulberry trees."† Having spent so many years in seclusion, and now having gone through the initiatory rite of baptism, and gained his first great victory in the silence of the wilderness, Jesus, the God-Man, re-appears in Galilee, fully prepared to begin first in this favored region his work, "having been anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power."‡

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* Psa. 90. 4. † Isa. 28. 21.

CHAPTER II.

CAPERNAUM.

A SCENE of enchantment rises to our view. We must go back nearly two thousand years, and contrast the sickly plain, with its present sparse population, its poorly cultivated fields, its toilers with faces sallow and pale, and the few scattered huts in which they live, with what it was in the time of our Saviour. Never perhaps was there a fairer garden plot than the land of Gennesareth ; lying for about the distance of four miles along the far famed shore of the Lake of Galilee, and extending some two miles in depth toward the steep mountains which enclose this lovely sea and plain on the west. Who would think there was, to look at it now, in the vicinity of Jericho two pieces of ground, the largest not more than a hundred feet broad, and two hundred feet in length, which produced those balsam trees, according to Pliny and Josephus, that grew nowhere else; while the unguent that was extracted from them was almost priceless, such healing virtue did it possess. Even Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen, when she visited Jerusalem, notwithstanding her inordinate greed, which all the gifts of Mark Antony could not long satisfy, deemed their annual product as rich and rare a present as Herod the Great could confer upon her; and went away reconciled to Herod and contented. So, as to the rich plain of which we speak, its former fertility, its rank luxuriance, (though the soil is still good), must not be judged of by the passing traveller, the solitary wanderer as he passes along musing over the change, by present appearances, where now the atmosphere is poisoned by malaria, the lifegiving breeze once blew softly over fields waving with golden grain; and the atmosphere, strangely attempered, was favorable to fruits of a temperate as well as of a hotter climate. Josephus, speaking as if there were a rivalry between the two as to which should flourish best, the walnut tree of a colder clime or the palm and fig indigenous to a Syrian sun, says, that here nature seems to have exhausted her stores both of air and soil to produce one of the sweetest and most desirable spots for a home, wander where you may over the whole wide stage.

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* 1 Sam. 5. 20. † 1 Chron. 14. 15. ‡ Acts 10. 38.

Three villages stood on this plain of Gennesareth, not one of them according to the statement of Josephus, containing less than fifteen thousand inhabitants. The one farthest to the north, and situated not far from where the road turns to the left to ascend the long rising mountain leading to the high plateau above, was Capernaum. The other two towns or villages were Bethsaida and Chorazin ; all of them perhaps nearly adjoining to each other : all of them with their vine clad porticos and numerous houses dotting the rich and fertile plain of Gennesareth. The waters of the placid and silver lake dashed gently in front of them all, washing the smooth shore, and giving to the green velvet lawns spread in front of these village houses or handsome villas a certain charm peculiar to a sea view. The fresh breeze and rippling wave of eventide fell upon the ear like music as the inhabitants sat in the porch of their dwellings, or walked forth to feel the reviving breeze from off the waters of the lake. Ah, how many a love tale was whispered in those delicious night communings along that peaceful moonlit shore, as the fond pair strolled, heedless of time. To them the future was gilded with clouds brighter than even those that were seen far above the horizon, rich and ruddy, as the sun sank swiftly in the western sea. Their day dreams were gay as ours, and not a cloud for a short breathing-spell of love darkened their sky. Little weened they, as little ween we of that sad reality, those darksome days which in life's history so soon succeed "love's young dream," and leave us, at least for a while till time sobers the fancy, like a vessel stranded on a desolate shore.

Wells of living water, still flowing ; cisterns or reservoirs for the purpose of irrigation in the warm summer months when little or no rain fell, and when otherwise the ground would be parched and dry, and the fruits would wither,—streams flowing down the mountain side, crossing the plain, and losing themselves in the lake, all combined to enrich and keep in perpetual bloom through the arid heats this most productive spot in all the land of Judea.

The mountains on the opposite side of the lake were clothed with verdure from the base to the top. Wherever there was a level space, however small, it was sown with grain ; and the vine clambered, the olive grew, and the palm flourished where grain could not be sown, or the land tilled around these rugged steeps. Where no fruit grew there flowers of every hue and of almost unfading verdure, adorned the mountain sides, and lent a charm to what otherwise would have been bleak and barren, with little or no relief to the weary eye. There is a charm, it is true, in rugged mountain sides, and even barren heaths, but in the present instance the bloom on the opposite hills, the trees, the golden grain, the flowers, the clambering vines supported by terraces laboriously built, were all in harmony with the beauty of the waters of the lake, and the fruitfulness and varied sylvan scenery and rich culture of the land of Gennesareth.

The lake itself, or rather the Sea of Galilee, as it is more poetically called, begirt with mountains, with an opening slanting to the north to admit the upper Jordan, and another at the south end where the land makes quite a curve inward, serving as an outlet for the waters of the river and the lake,—

how fair to the eye! With its broad expanse as a mirror reflecting the occasional cloud that flitted in the deep blue sky over its glassy bosom at midday's summer hour, or the mountain sides, as night drew on, and the sun partially withdrew his beams, leaving their dark shadow on the face of the eastern side of the lake, as of some overhanging turret or tower, or when night came, and the moon rode high in the heavens, reflecting his glistening beams as over the billowy wave they flicker and dance, or spangle the smooth surface; and the stars deep set in the sky. The night breeze blows fresh from the sea to the shore; whispers in the trees; and gently fans the face of the dwellers all along the silent shore, as they are seated in porch or portico, or on the lawn in front of their houses.

When the day breaks, and the sun arises, what a scene of activity is presented by the thousands that swarm as bees from the doors of their houses to engage in their several callings. How thronged is the shore; how numerous the fishermen, those who earn a livelihood with their boats and their nets. Life was the same with them as with us, and each returning day brought its daily care. There were those on the shore drying and mending their nets who had toiled all night; some with more, some with less success: there were others who had taken nothing, and somewhat listless, spent with fatigue and watching, they drew their boats to the shore, and soon lay down to sleep. Such is a fisherman's luck, now joyous with the draught he takes, anon somewhat despondent that he has caught nothing despite all his care and toil.

The lake, under the light of the morning sun, was alive with vessels of every size ; it was crowded with craft and ships of every description. A thousand oars dipped in the water ; a thousand sails whitened the sea, and fluttered in the breeze. All were not the boats of fishermen : some were large vessels carrying freight and passengers to different points, not only across to the opposite shore, but north and south, to the cities and districts in the vicinity of the Perea, and along the shore of the upper Jordan. There was many a pleasure craft, owned by the opulent ; spreading its sails before the wind, those on board luxuriating in the cool breeze, lying extended on soft cushions, and protected by painted awnings, like Cleopatra in her galley sailing "upon the river of Cydunus," from the rays of the burning sun. It would be strange indeed if Herod Antipas, having lately built Tiberius on the shore of the lake, naming it after the reigning emperor Tiberius, had not his royal vessel, with its banks of oars, and sails ; and embarking or board of it did not seek recreation with his court, and Herodias his brother's wife, on this lovely sheet of water. All was then gay and joyous, there was the hum of many voices on the shore, the noise of ropes and cordage at sea ; at night numerous lights glancing to and fro on the land ; there was the voice of song stealing over the waters ; the sound of hammer and axe ; all the bustle and animation of crowded life.

In Capernaum, a city made ever famous as the home of Jesus when driven from Nazareth, and the mighty works which were done there, was the house of Simon Peter. The spot where it stood cannot now be traced, as scarce a vestige of the city is left. The prediction of our Lord has long since been verified; and utter desolation has come over it. Not far, possibly, from the shore it stood perhaps facing the lake; the wavelets just lapping the shelving shore in front of the house. Close by were his boats, hauled up on the strand, and his nets hung up to dry,—Simon himself often seen busy mending them. Hitherto his occupation as a fisherman had been the business of his life; this he had followed for a livelihood, and he dreamed of no other. Even after his return from John's baptism, and his conviction that Jesus was the Messiah, he contemplated no change of life. It was simply as a disciple he attached himself to Jesus, as previously, after his baptism he had attached himself to John. He was one of those who had been led to receive and acknowledge Christ by the ministry and testimony of his forerunner. When Jesus in naming him read his heart, and revealed his inmost thoughts, showing him to himself as in a glass, he hesitated no longer, but confessed Christ with the warmth and energy that belonged to his character. His was one of those rare natures that never temporize, of which we now and then read in history, whom favor seduces not; who are true as steel, and redeem human nature from the charge of universal selfishness, brightening the dark side of life.

But while Simon thus boldly and promptly confessed Christ, and was among the first to acknowledge him as his nation's long looked for promised Messiah, he indulged in no vain dreams of earthly ambition. There was nothing in the appearance of Christ, nothing in his words, nothing in the language and testimony of John, to stir human passion, or awaken any hopes save those that were spiritual and divine. The influence was heavenly, not of the earth, earthy: Simon therefore when he returned home to his family, and exchanged the stirring scenes on the banks of the Jordan for the quiet of home and its sweet delights, its common every day pleasures, engaged in his business as a fisherman as usual. He had probably often at intervals attended John's ministry and baptism before ; perhaps when John first began, and when the whole country was aroused as from a deep sleep by his awakening voice. John did but announce what all were anxiously expecting—the Consolation of Israel ; and Simon with his brother and their partners James and John, leaving home and their business for a season were found among his hearers ; and after a short time were numbered among his chosen disciples.

Home again Simon launches his boat on the sea ; he goes in and out of his house ; his life is as simple as ever ; but a great change has come over him since he has seen Christ ; been surnamed by him Peter ; and had the benefit of several days sojourn with him. Lovely was the rich and fertile plain of Gennesareth before ; it is lovelier now ; dear was his home, it is dearer now. The herbage is greener ; the flowers emit a sweeter odor ; the air is filled with a perfume that seems to come down from the skies ; and morning dawn and dewy eve, and stilly night, or the whispering wind, and the ripple of the gentle wave on the shore, all harmonize with feelings attuned to love, and new born from above. It cannot be but that Simon Peter the fisherman is looking, like Nathaniel, for great things from the presence of Christ; though they may not have assumed as yet any particular form of coherence in his mind.

But he had found Christ. He had rejoiced in John, in his light, but it was the joy of those that watch for the morning, to whom the morning star is the prelude of day. Now it is not John but the day-spring from on high that salutes his rejoicing eyes. We can form some conception of the newly awakened emotions of this warm hearted disciple of our Lord from the very fact that he was said to be "blessed" because of the revelation of the Messiah to him. Blessed in the actual realization of the presence of Christ among his people; blessed in his belief of him as the Messiah, while so many who had seen Christ and heard the testimony of John concerning him, stood afar off, afraid to venture upon him and throw their doubts to the winds. Blessed in the fond anticipation that the glory of the people of Israel, whatever form it might take, had at length broke upon the world; and the promise, the prophecy of Isaiah, spoken so long before, was now literally fulfilled: "arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."* It was as if a new world had been created. The darkness was now retiring, the gross darkness that covered the people. Simon Peter saw this, and hence the joy that filled his heart, pervaded his whole being, and gave to nature a new aspect, to life a new charter, radiant with the new hopes of unending good.

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* Isa. 60. 1.

CHAPTER III.

THE SYNAGOGUE.

TEMPORARILY, on this his first visit, Jesus came to Capernaum "with his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples," after the marriage in Cana of Galilee; on which occasion he turned water into wine, "and manifested forth his glory."* It was not until after John was cast into prison, that our Lord took up his permanent abode in this highly favored city.† Their faith greatly increased by what they had seen, for they were witnesses of the miracle which Jesus had performed, the disciples joyfully descended the mountain path that led to the city, all of them, save Philip and Nathaniel, residents of Capernaum, Simon and Andrew occupying the same house.‡ As they came down the mountain there lay the Sea of Galilee shining like molten silver, all alive with boats and vessels, many a sail whitening the sea, with its shores lined with houses, its vines laden with grapes, its fig trees filled with figs ready to drop from their branches, the ground

* John 2. 11, 12. † Matt. 4. 12, 13. ‡ Mark 3. 29.

covered with nuts from the walnut tree, the leaves and the foliage still green though the season was fast fading away.

Journeying on foot it was probably near the close of day as the little company we have mentioned, one woman among them, and she most blessed among women, wound down the mountain, and turning to the right, near a well still existing, entered the city, after a toilsome day's travel. The cool breeze of evening fanned their heated brows, and gladly they sought their several habitations, or those of them that were strangers temporary places of rest for the coming night. As yet Jesus was not met at every step by vast crowds, and with the hush of evening, not noticed, not strikingly distinguished from the rest, quietly entered some friendly house where he lodged with his mother and brethren, finding food, rest, and welcome until the morning. The Son of Man, weary, was glad to rest, to be refreshed, according to the eastern fashion, by the washing of his feet, having laid his sandals aside, and appearing with his bare feet. Then followed the evening meal, accompanied by a blessing from those lips soon to be touched with a coal of fire that was to electrify nations. Until now they had been closed: sealed with the signet of the Almighty; but soon they were to open, and to pour forth rivers as of living water. Night comes on quickly in that climate after the sun is set; and soon "tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep" fell upon all under that lowly roof.

The following Sabbath saw Jesus in the synagogue. At Cana of Galilee, at the marriage feast the disciples had "beheld the glory" of Christ, the first manifestation of his power, the outbeaming of the glory of the Godhead that dwelt within, even as the Shekinah abode in the temple; they are now to see him in a new light ; to hear his words, and to feel the spell which none but Christ, in the same degree, swaying such an influence, was able to produce. There was that in his manner, a nameless charm, an irresistible potency, heretofore unknown among men

All that human eloquence, even the highest genius ever reached, the grace of Cicero, the force of Demosthenes, paled as smoke vanishing into thin air before the fascination, heavenly in its origin and nature, with which Jesus arrested all hearts, and drew them to himself with such chords of holy love, with so divine an influence, that they were ready to follow him round the world. As he spoke he absorbed their whole nature ; they thought of nothing else ; they seemed to live for no other purpose than to listen and to love. Was there action ? Little or none. He sat upon the grass, or on a seat in a boat : when he read the Scriptures, as a mark of reverence, he stood up, but when he had done reading, and was about to address the people, he seated himself. He made no such electrical appeals as Demosthenes when he would arouse his countrymen against the insidious designs of Philip, or as Cicero when he would array the Roman senate against Cataline ; (his was rather the easy flow of Isocrates) the voice of Jesus was not in the strong wind that rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but it was a "still small voice."* It melted, it dissolved the human heart, as never before was known among men, into tenderness and love. The deepest feelings of our nature were stirred in a way that could not be traced, or resisted. The great deep was broken up. Every emotion, every movement of the soul, that was awakened, while under the trance produced by the charm of his words, was pure, was divine, all was born of the skies. All present breathed for the time the very atmosphere of the heavenly world.

What greatly aided the charm of his manner, the sweetness of his words, the heavenly influence by which they were attended, their power to subdue the human heart, was the transcendent personal beauty of the Son of Man. The chisel of the sculptor had done all that art could accomplish to form a faultless figure, to embody in the countenance every line of beauty; the imagination had been brought in to improve if possible upon nature; to imprint divinity upon a human face; to combine a thousand speaking outlines into one; to make an Apollo; to form a perfect man; but the man Jesus far surpassed all that art had done, or the imagination conceived; and he stood forth, as Adam in the garden, faultless; the perfection of the workmanship of the Almighty. No painter, not even the divinest of all, Raffaelle, ever gave to that face the ideal formed in our mind of its heaven born loveliness. We turn away from' every effort of the pencil, not satisfied with the expression of the countenance; sensible from our inward consciousness that it falls far short of the divine original. None but he that paints the sky with those ruby colors that we vainly imitate, none but he who adorns the parterre with richest flowers of every varied hue, who clothes the garniture of fields with its unrivalled green, who sends the fleecy clouds moving softly and swiftly along the face of the azure blue sky, with the pale and melancholy moon wading through them as a ship through the billowy white crested wave of the sea, could ever draw to the life the unspeakable tenderness, serenity, unearthly purity and matchless beauty of him who is described in poetic strains never yet equalled, as "the altogether lovely."* His breath was as the odor of violets; the perfume that he spread around him, was as "a bundle of myrrh," "as a cluster of camphor in the vineyards of Engedi." Those eyes so soft and tender were as "dove's eyes."† Jesus was "fair," fairer than the children of men.

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* 1 Kings 19. 11, 12.

What also increased the effect of all our blessed Lord said and did, was the dignity of his mien, and the authority of his speech. There was that in his speech, such a sense of the reality and truth of what he said, and as flowing from an absolute conviction, from the most vivid perception of the force of his words, however high the strain, and great the demand upon the unqualified assent of his hearers, that no language can convey; but which arrested the attention of all, (even of his enemies) and commanded universal wonder and admiration. "He spake as one having authority, and not as the scribes." Their words were powerless, and their speculations dry. They touched not the conscience, they awakened not the sensibilities. Their harangue however labored, fell as dust upon dry ground ; it made no impression ; it left no traces of quickening truth behind. Neither came they with any tone of authority, or voice of command. How different from Christ ! When he spoke it was as a king upon his throne, with his crown upon his head, and his sceptre in his right hand : nay, as the King of kings, and Lord of lords, life and death hung suspended upon his words. They could not be played with as a flower, inhaling its perfume for a moment, admiring its beauty, and then casting it regardlessly away.

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* Song Sol. Chap 1. 13, 14. † Ibid. 15

Who can portray the dignity with which Christ spoke, and looked, and moved. That majestic air, that Godlike mïen. We have read of earthly kings whose very look, tone of voice, gesture, and motion of their bodies, bespoke a suitableness to their high position, and inspired a certain awe in the beholder, but this cannot give us, by any means, a full perception of the incomparable majesty, and more than royal dignity of Christ. Among the crowds on the banks of the Jordan, no doubt at the time of his baptism, his form and port, like that of the lion among the beasts of the forest, attracted the gaze of the multitude, ere he was publicly announced by his forerunner (John the Baptist) as the Messiah ; and they said one to another, "Who is this man ? whence does he come ?" But blended with an inconceivable superiority, an unapproachable majesty, there was a certain simplicity, a gentle demeanor, a kind and loving look, a friendly address, a warmth, that invited all to the nearest approach, and put them at once at rest. The bosom that heaved ever with love, opened wide the arms of welcome to all. As a bird in its nest fluttering over its young, so all might find a resting place, especially the weak, the timid, the poor, the sad, the sorrowful, the helpless, the sighing, the troubled, the oppressed, in the warm sympathy, the tender love, the compassionate bosom of this "lover of souls," this friend of human kind, the Saviour and Redeemer of the world; the great Restorer of the earth to more than the beauty of the garden of Eden.

The discourse of our Lord, on this eventful day, the first of his public ministry, when he appeared among men, we may fairly conclude related to himself; to his great mission. We know from what words he spake in Nazareth; and if he spake not from the same at this time, we may reasonably conclude that the substance of what he said was the same. In those passages from Isaiah he announced that he came to deliver the world from the thraldom of sin and Satan; to introduce a new era; to set up a kingdom in direct opposition to that of "the prince of this world," which should eventually overturn that of Satan, overcome all opposition, put down the powers of darkness, vanquish hell, and like the stone cut out of the mountain without hands fill the whole earth, solving the mystery of providence, and determining the final destiny of the whole human family. The vision of Jesus was not bounded by the hills, the lakes, the valleys, the plains of Judea ; he stood on the mount of vision ; he surveyed the wide world, with its fields white unto the harvest ; the golden grain ready to be reaped ; and the groaning earth, as Virgil sung, ready to be released from bondage. Prophecy had sketched the scene, and even the present visit of Jesus to Capernaum; his appearance in the synagogue on this day. His removal from Nazareth, and permanent abode in this city, with the glorious results flowing therefrom, had been thus strikingly and minutely described: (This too at a time of great national depression, and forsaking of the land.)

> "The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephtalim,
> By the way of the sea, beyond Jordan,—
> Galilee of the nations :—
> The people which sat in darkness saw great light,
> And to them which sat in the region and shadow of death
> Light is sprung up."*

Between seven and eight hundred years had passed away since the enunciation of these prophetic words; and upon Galilee's lake and hills, upon the country beyond the Jordan, upon Tyre and Sidon, within the limits of Phenicia, upon the country of the Gadarenes, and upon all the Gentile nations, upon Syria, bordering upon, and encompassing Galilee, this "great Light," Jesus the Son of God, had newly arisen, and was about beginning to shine with resplendent lustre, sending out his bright beams, diffusing his glad rays, not only upon Galilee first and foremost, and thence "throughout all Judea,"* but upon Syria, Decapolis, and all the surrounding heathen nations.

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*Compare Matt. 4, 13, 14, with Isa. 9. 1, 2.

In the times of Elijah and Elisha glimpses of this bright light had been seen; Sarepta, a city of Sidon, had caught one of its earliest rays: Syria had been visited by it in the person of Naaman, "a great captain, and a mighty man in war;"† Abraham by faith had seen this glorious day afar off, when God said to him that "in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed; because he had obeyed the voice of God."‡ Thus Simeon, when the fullness of the time had come, as he held the child Jesus in his trembling arms, spake of him as Isaiah had done, (not once, but again and again, in unmistakeable language)§ not only as "the glory of Israel," but "a light to lighten the Gentiles."‖ "Who, "then, "is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke?" whose arms embrace the whole world? who breaks the partition wall which for two thousand years has divided the Jew from the Gentile; who, indifferent alike to rank and race, to free and bond, to creed or ritual, to robe or book, says: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."¶

Jesus, with a bosom as expansive as the universe, a heart tender as that of a little child, overflowing with human sympathy, announces himself as their spiritual deliverer, first on the part of his own people, as the healer of the breach sin had made. To heal their wounds he applies himself before going to the Gentiles; not now shocking the deep seated prejudices of his countrymen, or arousing their wrath by making his mission to the Gentile world prominent when he tells them that "this is the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance" (in a loving sense) "of our God." He glances at this wide commission, broad as the earth, overlooking not one of God's creatures, however sunk in ignorance and idolatry in a general way, in terms significant but not calculated to excite jealousy or distrust. The discourse flowed smoothly as a gentle stream amid "beds of spices;" "grace was poured into his lips;" every eye was fixed upon him; all admired, and were enraptured at the words of love and tenderness that dropped "as the rain, distilled as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." There was nothing harsh, nothing to terrify,—all to allure. "Come lay your burden at my feet, rest your weary aching head upon my bosom; tell me all your griefs, leave none behind." I am here "to comfort all that mourn; to give beauty for ashes; the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; to create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy; that they all may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified." *

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* Acts 10. 37. † 2 Kings 5. 1.

‡ Gen. 12. 3. also Gen. 22. 18. § Isa. 42. 6. 49. 6.

‖ Luke 2. 32. ¶ Isa. 66. 2.

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* Isa. 61. 3. also Isa. 65. 18.

But what is most conspicuous of all, the chief feature which should attract our attention, and hold us spell bound under an influence altogether divine, rising far above any human claim, is, that in using these words our Lord applies them not to God the Father, but to himself in his human form as the Son of man. There is no arrogancy in this. The power to "bind up the broken hearted," everywhere throughout the Jewish Scriptures is applied to the Almighty. "From the ends of the earth," said the Psalmist, "will I cry unto thee when my heart is overwhelmed within me." To whom did Hagar in the wilderness, when perishing with thirst direct her prayer, and who came to her relief? Who heard the plaintive cry of the children of Israel in their house of bondage in the land of Egypt? who but Jehovah of the Hosts? Yet Jesus, our Jesus, in the Synagogue, in the ears of all the people of Capernaum, tells us in a calm, unimpassioned manner, and with the simplest form of speech, that he is "the balm of Gilead,—the Rock of ages,—the full flowing fountain of life and health; the true source of joy and gladness; the great physician and sure healer of every wounded soul, of every sorrowful breast."

Is not this the voice of God? the voice David heard sounding along the tops of the mulberry trees, calling his bannered hosts to battle against their foes, and leading them on to victory? Ah, whenever the nation was in distress—when, for instance, they were led for the space of forty years travelling through the wilderness, as a shepherd leads his sheep, was it not Jehovah that pitied and sustained them? "as an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them upon her wings?"* Yet Jesus tells us he is the mourners' friend. "He is the Rock, the shield, the horn of salvation, the high tower, the refuge, the Saviour"† of his people.

Was not this the angel in the wilderness? Yet here he stands to-day with form of more than mortal mould, as a man partaking of flesh and blood—bone of our bone, but claiming alliance with the skies,—without self-assertion, as one whose sovereign right none can dispute. Can we wonder that angels in amaze witnessed this spectacle, not yet fathoming the abounding mercy and penetrating the vast designs of the Almighty. Will the Jews of this day, these of Capernaum, assembled for worship on this still, sweet Sabbath day, repeat the sad story of their fathers, and reject the Lord of life and glory?

While our Lord was speaking, every ear attentive, every eye fixed, all present lost in wonder and amaze, suddenly a loud cry, shrill and angry, was heard, startling the audience, and producing great commotion. There was a man in the Synagogue, sitting with the rest, who shook from head to foot, and exhibited every mark of mental agitation: in every other respect there was no indication of a diseased body, or disordered mind. Perhaps at that very instant "a spirit of an unclean devil"‡ entered and took possession of him, as our spirits do of us in sleep, when they are left free to act uncurbed by our will, unchecked by the body, and we have no more control of their volition than if we were dead. In the time of our Lord, Satan's domain was wider than it is now; and demoniacal possession existed, certainly throughout Judea, to a very great extent. Whether it was restricted to that particular land, and confined to that precise period of time, we know not, but that it did exist and prevail then and there is most evident. It was not a disease; it was an actual possession of the person by an "unclean spirit."*

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* Deut. 32. 11. † Sam. 2. 22, 3 ‡ Luke 4. 33.

The man was as helpless in this condition, and as incapable of freeing himself from Satanic control as we ourselves under the demon witchery of nightmare. In this case in the synagogue the person possessed was a mere instrument in the hands of Satan; his own mind was kept in a state of abeyance as ours in sleep; it did not act; neither did the person speak; but "the spirit" that had entered into him spoke; and probably with his own voice, the lips of the man being closed. These were the words that fell upon the ears of the startled assemblage; they were addressed to Jesus; not certainly with a good intent we may be sure, whatever their purport. The language used expresses fear and distress, and yet repulsion. It breathes hostility; there is in it nothing of love; nothing of submission to Christ. It is the clarion note first sounded by Satan in the wilderness; and must be regarded by his agents as part of a regular system of tactics designed to hinder if not baffle Christ Jesus our

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* Mark 1. 23.

Lord in his contest with sin and Satan, death and hell.

"Let us alone," said the unclean spirit; as if he was not alone—not left unaided in the struggle:—"what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God."*

Here was no mark of insanity; of a disordered intellect; but of superior intelligence. The vision of this fallen spirit extended beyond that of man; it surveyed with angels round the throne the pathway from heaven to earth trod by Christ, and to some extent penetrated his strange design to ransom, and so deliver from bondage Adam's fallen race. He saw himself foredoomed; and bound to suffer defeat and shame; and with his compeers to fall prostrate before the triumphal car of the "Holy One" of Israel.

"With authority,"—with a voice clear, distinct, loud and commanding, Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and bade him "hold his peace, and come out of him." At the sound of that voice, which shall yet reach the dull ear of all that are in their graves—which with a syllable spoke the world into existence, so all potent is it; and which will ultimately still, as the waves of the sea, every disturbing element of men and devils, both in heaven, earth and hell, the unclean spirit, losing all power of resistance, uttered one loud, piercing cry, and casting the man down violently on the floor, in the fierceness of his rage and the impotency of his malice came out of the possessed, and left him in peace and in holy quietude.

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* Mark 1. 24.

When the assembly broke up, and the people began to disperse, retiring to their homes, some this way, others that, walking slowly along, the one theme of conversation among the various groups threading the different streets of the city, or pacing along the shore, (not a vessel seen on the lake on this Jewish Sabbath, all either tied fast to the docks, anchored a little distance off the harbour, or hauled up on shore), was the dispossession by Jesus of the evil spirit. "What thing is this?" they said, "what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him."*

On their way home, as well as when seated in the house, or under the shade of some overspreading tree, or by the side of some running stream flowing through meadow or field, the discussion did not turn upon the fact of demoniacal possession; this was a point conceded, not argued, but upon the power of him who had but to speak, and was instantly obeyed. Their eyes opened wide—they were filled with wonder at such an exhibition. To heal the sick with a word or a touch, astonishing as that was, was as nothing in comparison in their eyes, to the far greater work of bringing into complete subjection these forces of evil, wicked spirits; delivering men "that were possessed with devils." Our Lord at a later period of his ministry exhorts his disciples to rejoice not so much that the "devils were subject to them," through the power that he gave them, as that "their names were written in heaven." However mysterious this subject may be to us, it is no more so than "the mystery of iniquity" itself; which however at variance with our sensibilities, and opposed to our reason, nevertheless exists, and apart from the simple record of the Bible, baffles inquiry, and defies investigation. The entire action of the Bible, as in that of the great epic poem of "Paradise Lost," turns upon the "war in heaven," between God and Satan: first disturbing the peace and serenity of the heavenly world, thence transferred to our earth, and covering it ever since with "garments rolled in blood," misery and wretchedness in every varying form, and ever falling tears. Whatever the original cause, we may as well ignore the existence of evil in our world, as demoniacal possession in the time of our Saviour; for the mystery in the one case is no greater than in the other; and to be consistent, we should either receive or reject both, being governed in both instances by Bible testimony. If we put aside "the mystery of iniquity" which stands in such close contact, and in so strange a contrast with "the mystery of godliness," if we consign to oblivion, as an old wife's tale, the Bible account of "the dragon, that old serpent which is the Devil, and Satan,* what becomes of all that is written of Christ; of the end or chief design for which he came into our world, to wit, "to destroy the works of the Devil," to wipe out from off the earth the traces of his footsteps, the "curse" pronounced upon it, the final and complete overthrow of the kingdom of evil and darkness, never to rise again, and to establish upon its ruins the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ.

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* Mark 1. 27.

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* Rev. 12. 7.—20. 2.

We do not mean at present to refer to the events that followed the close of this remarkable day when our Lord first began to "preach the Gospel of the Kingdom," but to close with the testimony, however reluctantly given by "the unclean spirit" to the Messiahship of Jesus:

"I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God."*

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* Mark 1. 24.

BOOK FOURTH.

CHAPTER I.

JERUSALEM.

SOME time having been spent in Capernaum, as also in other cities of Galilee—preaching in the synagogues, healing the sick "of divers diseases," and above all "casting out many devils," (the fact of demoniacal possession being unquestioned in those days, and invariably separated in ordinary nomenclature from the phenomena of disease) and the winter months passing swiftly away, Jesus prepared with the approach of spring to go up to Jerusalem, to attend the Feast of the Passover, and on that broader stage, and under the eaves of the temple, and in the presence of the Sanhedrin to assert his claim, and proclaim himself, if not in words in acts, the Jewish Messiah. The reception of Christ in Galilee was comparatively cold despite his preaching and the works which he did, and his great fame, a fame daily increasing and which carried his name beyond the limits of Galilee and Perea, the country beyond Jordan, far into Syria and the surrounding nations, for the reason that he had not passed the ordeal of Jerusalem, had not yet submitted himself, and his claim and his doctrine, to this fiery scrutiny. The Galileans stood more or less aloof, holding themselves in reserve until Jerusalem should sanction his claim and acknowledge his pretensions. Should he stand this test then they would act, they would confess him too.*

If ever spring broke auspiciously upon our world with its fragrance-breathing flowers, its clear running streams, its softly-blowing gales, its fanning zephyrs, its odoriferous newly-turned earth, with the low cooing notes of the turtle-dove, "and the vines with the tender grape giving a good smell," this was such a spring; nature's second natal day; a new day for man and for the world. Well might it most emphatically be said, "The day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."†

Leaving Galilee, in company with his disciples, and possibly with his mother, his four brethren and his sisters—all of whom accompanied him to Capernaum after the marriage in Cana of Galilee—Jesus came in his public capacity to the city of Jerusalem to attend the Feast of the Passover. Great numbers were coming at the same time from Galilee, as well as from every other part of the land; from Idumea and from the country beyond the Jordan. They traveled in groups; at times so many joined together as to constitute a caravan. Members of the same household, kindred and neighbors, were associated in one harmonious brotherhood; by easy stages, mostly on foot, they hastened to be present at the feast, to see the city of their love, and to worship at the temple. Nothing on earth was so dear to the Jew as that sacred shrine and the hill Moriah upon which it stood.

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* In proof of this temporizing disposition of the Galileans, we refer the reader to the following passage: "Then when he was come into Galilee, the Galileans received him, having seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem, at the feast; for they also went unto the feast." John 4. 45

† Luke 1. 78, 79.

To the little band of disciples how dear was the privilege, how highly prized, of accompanying Jesus to Jerusalem to the feast. His society and conversation gave to their journey unwonted zest. The joy they felt sparkled in their eyes, and made the dusty highway a path of flowers. At noontide they would rest under the shade of some spreading tree, and like the angels under the oak of the plain of Mamre partake of a frugal repast suited to that heated clime—a few dates or figs, or a bunch of grapes, with a morsel of bread—while they drank from some running brook, or adjacent well or fountain of living water. At night they reposed under tents which the camels carried with their provisions, or wrapping themselves in their mantles lay upon the ground.

Two or three days were consumed on the journey; each day's travel one of delight. As they passed through Samaria, however, they avoided all intercourse with the inhabitants, as if contact with them would defile their garments and taint their persons. With what pity must Jesus have beheld their narrow views, their bigotry, their hate and unconquerable aversion.

At length from the hills to the north of the city Jerusalem is seen; with its high walls, its strong towers, its holy temple with golden pinnacles glittering in the sunlight. What emotions are excited by the sight, what love is felt. "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy."* Was ever a city so loved! so dear to the human heart. This in all ages; amid all disasters; in absence, expatriation, down to the present day. The name kindles a holy fire; and what true son of Israel does not look forward to the day when her name shall yet be a praise among the nations of the earth.† She shall yet rise from her ashes, recover her glory, and more than her pristine name and fame.‡

Eighteen years had passed away, since Jesus at the age of twelye had visited the city with his parents Joseph and Mary; had attended the feast, and had the celebrated conference with the Jewish doctors in one of the chambers of the temple. That visit was contemporaneous with the almost complete overturn of the Jewish civil polity. Archelaus had just been banished and deprived of his government by the decree of Cæsar Augustus, and Coponius made procurator of Judea, Herod Philip and Herod Antipas, however, retaining their different tetrarchies. As for Judea proper, it was annexed as a Roman province to Syria, Publius Sulpitius Quirinius (called in Luke's gospel Cyrenius*) being appointed its president. From this time taxes were paid directly to Rome, though the registration of each man's property, with the description thereof had been taken eleven years before by Sentius Saterninus. "The power of life and death was also taken out of the hands of the Jews, and placed wholly in the Roman procurator."

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* Ps. 137. 5.

† Prophecy is very full and distinct on this point.

‡ Read chapters 60, 61, and 62 of Isaiah.

And thus events converging at this particular juncture of time, Shiloh having come, Jesus having made his first public appearance in the temple, "the scepter," according to the prophecy of Jacob on his dying bed, having "departed from Judah and a lawgiver from between his feet,"† Pompey the Great (as he is called), son-in-law, afterwards rival, of Julius Cæsar, gave the first blow to the Asmonean dynasty and kingdom of Judea. Herod the Great, an Idumean by birth, but a Jew by adoption and circumcision, as was his father, Antipater, before him, restored its power and enlarged its boundaries during his greatly prosperous reign of thirty-seven years; but after his death and the deposition of his son Archelaus, it fell wholly into the hands of the Romans, though the whole Jewish polity was not completely destroyed until after the lapse of sixty-two years, when temple and city alike fell under the conquering hand of Titus, son of the then reigning emperor, Vespasian.

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* Prid. Con. Vol. 2. p. 420.

† Gen. 49. 10.

But at the time of which we now write there was not a speck in the cloudless sky; the troubles that had at first risen from the payment of taxes or tribute directly to Rome, had subsided; save in certain exceptional cases they were paid without remonstrance. Peace extended its wing over the land, and indeed for the most part throughout all the provinces of the Roman empire.

At a moment so favorable, at a time of general peace and quiet, Jesus steps upon the stage, and makes his looked-for appearance in Jerusalem. His name had already been heralded from Galilee, and from beyond Jordan. The deputation of Levites and priests to John had returned and made their report; it was favorable neither to the one nor the other. They did not approve of John's baptism, they demurred at his right to baptize, and were not disposed to accept his explanation, or to receive the angelic message on which it was founded. Still more they disliked his testimony concerning Jesus; they were almost inclined to think it a mere fraud, and to class the two together as impostors; though in the presence of the people—all followers of John and esteeming him a prophet—they kept these opinions to themselves. Chafing with ire, irritated by jealousy, filled with hate, they returned to the city and put every thing before the Sanhedrin, the body that sent them, in the darkest colors, and embittered beforehand most of the members of this Jewish Senate and supreme council of the nation against Jesus and his forerunner, John. Thus was the train laid in advance for that hostility to Christ and his mission which resulted in the death of the Saviour, and ultimately in the destruction of the Jewish nation.

But while this most influential body (which still retained by permission of the Romans more or less power in religious matters over its own people), were thus prepared from the first to meet Christ in an attitude of defiance, with menace on their lips and rage in their hearts, the people generally received him gladly, and almost worshiped the very ground beneath his feet. His words charmed them, his presence acted on them as a spell, his deeds filled them with wonder. They only waited to see what reception he would meet with from the priests and scribes, from the leaders of public opinion, in the chief city of the nation. There were, besides, great numbers of people present at the feast who had heard the testimony of John concerning Jesus; some, it is probable, who were present at his baptism, and who saw and heard what took place then; many also from Galilee who had witnessed his miracles, and others, perhaps, of the sick who had been healed, or of those from whom Jesus had cast out the unclean spirits; all of them ready to speak and testify of Him, "the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee," thus spreading abroad his name, and making him the chief object of attraction to the vast crowds gathered at this chief festival of the year.

The news circulated also among those who came from distant parts, from indeed nearly if not quite all the provinces of the Roman empire to celebrate the feast. With what joy they came to the parent land, ready to kiss the soil they loved so well, when, their voyage ended, they landed on its western coast. These strangers, though Jews, (where, over the wide world, were Jews not to be found at the time of our Saviour's birth, and during his lifetime on the earth?) now for the first time heard of Jesus, and, from his claim as their Messiah, could not fail to be greatly interested in the common report. The news flew from one to another, and soon circulated throughout the entire city, among all classes, both native and foreign Jews. It was also of national import; it concerned the whole people and their future well-being. What hopes of national aggrandizement it was calculated to inspire; what an echo from the past; from the voices of the prophets; from their sacred books hoar with age.

Great then, and wide-spread, must have been the interest, the deep, all-absorbing interest, excited by the presence of Jesus at Jerusalem during the Feast of the Passover—a festival linked so inseparably with the name and sacrificial offering of Jesus from the time of its institution in the land of Egypt.

CHAPTER II.

THE TEMPLE.

JUST four years before the birth of Christ, nine and a half years having been spent in the rebuilding of the main edifice, the temple was opened anew for divine service; for the worship of the God of Israel. Herod the Great, magnificent in every thing, expended what might seem fabulous sums upon this building. Five hundred years of wear and tear had robbed the temple of Zorobabel, built after the Chaldean captivity, of what beauty it once possessed; though the second temple, erected in a time of poverty and distress, when the Jewish state was at a very low ebb, bore no comparison in splendor and costliness with the first.

But while the temple proper was so soon finished, the enclosure of the courts, the completion of the stately corridors, or porticoes, with all the various outbuildings, was not yet accomplished, and great numbers of workmen were now employed upon them, and so continued during the whole of our Saviour's ministry. During the festival of course the sound of the saw and the axe ceased, and there was nothing to disturb the solemnity of this sacred scene.

Still this stately edifice, this holy temple, this house of prayer, not for the Jews exclusively, but for all the nations of the earth (as Jesus himself emphatically declared*) this house differing from all other temples, as free from the degradation of idol worship, where God only was adored and his unity acknowledged, was at the first public appearance of Jesus in all its glory. Its white marble exterior, highly polished almost as a sapphire stone, shone with a splendor that dazzled the eye and charmed the beholder. The royal portico on the south, for its elegance of finish, the richness of its woodwork, its lofty height, its noble columns of the Corinthian order, its majestic width, its broad marble pavement, was said to equal if not surpass any of the Grecian or Roman school.

Of course the Jewish artist for his labor of love had the best models under his eye, and expended upon them all his genius. Foreign aid, even, may have been called in to embellish every part of the building, though this is doubtful. The porch of the temple proper was most magnificent, and gold was not spared, nor what was costlier, Corinthian brass, to enrich and set off to the greatest advantage both the exterior and interior of this house of God, destined to receive in its wide embrace the poor and the sorrowful, the mourners of all the nations of the earth.

Whatever of narrowness, cold-heartedness, sectarianism or bigotry, may be found in modern or ancient Christianity, so called, there is nothing of this in the religion of Jesus. Why not contemplate him in his true character, as even a Rousseau did, instead of the false image which men have set up, and see if it is possible to withhold from him the tribute of your hearts, and the homage of your admiration.

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* Mark 4. 17.

But the paschal lamb had been killed, and the feast partaken of in many a family group, by many a household, in commemoration of the deliverance from Egypt, and in hope of a still greater deliverance, adumbrated, shadowed forth, by the institution of this sacred festival. The more solemn part of the ceremonies over, and the additional rites and sacrifices used on this occasion concluded, after the first day or so the interest mainly centered in and around Christ. All eyes were drawn to him; and the hopes of many were awakened by his presence in the temple and at the feast. He went in and out with the rest, a smile of ineffable sweetness sat upon his face, every movement was natural, easy graceful. Whoever saw the human countenance so divine—with such features or pencil lines of celestial beauty?

The temple, fair without, was not so within; the hands of those who bore the vessels of the Lord were not so clean as they should have been. The temple itself was defiled by the uses to which it was put, especially on such an occasion as the present, when a holy solemnity was kept unto the Lord, by those who were its custodians, its select keepers, and who should have preserved inviolate its sanctity.

Greatly had the Jews been outraged by the Samaritans, who some years before, taking advantage of the opening of the gates at midnight during the celebration of this feast, cast dead men's bones into the revered and sacred courts of the temple, a most sacrilegious act, a wanton piece of wickedness, but now both priests and Levites had connived at practices which desecrated the temple, and this too, perhaps, for gain. They made merchandise of what was so holy, and set a bad example to those who looked to them for instruction in righteousness, and guidance in holy living.

For several years there had been throughout the whole country what might among moderns be termed a revival of religion, under the ministry and baptism of John; Jerusalem had poured forth its population; from all parts of the land the people hurried to the Jordan. Many had repented and received the knowledge of the remission of sins; but the reformation had not penetrated to any great extent within the walls of the temple. The priesthood as a body, as we have seen, stood aloof from both John and Christ, and with deadly animosity in their hearts, did but wait for the time when as a falcon they should dart upon their prey.

What day of the feast it occurred we know not, but on some day of this holy week our Lord arose in his might, "stooping down, crouching as a lion, and as an old lion,"* to purify his house, to make it what it was designed to be, not a "den of thieves," not a "house of merchandise," but a house of prayer, a temple for the worship of the ever-living, supreme, and eternal God.

Suddenly as a flash of lightning, or as a clap of thunder, or shock of an earthquake, (for so must it have seemed to the amazed multitude), Jesus appeared in his house, "came to his temple," was seen in the midst of his people, even Jesus the Lord, for whose coming the Jews were "looking" "the messenger of the covenant whom they delighted in."* But such was his ineffable purity, such the glory by which he was encompassed, the majesty with which he was invested, beyond the grandeur of any earthly monarch, so searching the expression of that all-piercing eye, diving far down into the deepest and darkest depths of the human heart, and exposing its most hidden recesses, bringing into the broad light of day all that was evil there, that the prophet in anticipation (in a subsidiary sense) of what was to transpire on this day, said: "But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap."†

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* Gen. 49. 9

All eyes were fastened on Jesus, as he appeared in the courts of the Lord's house, with a scourge in his hand, and with such a look of command, with such a tone of authority, that both priest and Levite—backed by all the power of the Sanhedrin—the moral force of which was immense, apart from their legislative and political enactments—fell powerless before him. Not a mouth was opened, not a hand lifted, not a syllable of remonstrance was uttered to oppose the progress of Christ as he arose to "purify the sons of Levi, to purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord the offering of righteousness."*

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* The reader will carefully peruse Mal. 4. 1, and adjoining verses.

† Mal. 4. 2

In the great outer court of the temple, none the less sacred because open to the Gentiles, and in fact called the "Court of the Gentiles," a large space, probably a very large space, was appropriated, under the supervision of the custodians of the temple, and with their sanction and consent, as an Exchange, a place also of barter, as a common market place: into which sacred enclosure even cattle were frequently brought, sheep and oxen; where also doves for the poorer classes were offered for sale.

Such a vast number of sheep were usually slain during this annual feast, each family having at least one, that they must have required much room, even allowing for the replenishing of the number as fast as the space appropriated to them was emptied. Then the Exchange brokers, not few in number, with their counters or tables, ready to accommodate customers, and for a percentage to give them current Jewish coin for their present purposes, in exchange for foreign coin brought from distant parts, occupied a certain space in the consecrated enclosure, and carried on a profitable business. We gather also from the words of Christ, that holy as was the place, and solemn the occasion, there were "false swearers" among them, those who did not hesitate "to defraud" their brethren in the way of barter and sale, provided thereby they could increase their gains. In a word, as in any mart of trade, there was the spirit of rivalry, of what is called "sharp practice," each one seeking to gain the advantage of another. This, too, in sight of the heathen, of the Gentile world, thereby bringing reproach upon Judaism, and the sacred name wherewith they were called.

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*Mal. 4. 3.

The outer court, therefore, instead of being reserved as a place of prayer for the Gentiles, for those whom the fame of the temple brought thither to worship (like Marcus Agrippa, the friend of Cæsar Augustus, who, though not a Jew, offered sacrifices in the temple) was occupied as a place of merchandise; and amid the strife of words between buyer and seller, and the general hum and bustle of trade, was but little calculated to excite devotion, or to favorably impress, in any way, the mind of the stranger looking on this holy solemnity for the first time. Perhaps he had begun to see the vanity of idol worship, perhaps had heard of the God of the Jews, and sick at heart, weary of wandering over the earth for rest had sought it here, to find that even among those gathered to honor a pure and living Deity, there existed impurity, avarice, and deceit.

What must have been the amazement, nay even the terror that seized men's minds, both priests and people, when they saw Jesus—but yesterday an obscure man, sustained by no power from without, in the face of a thousand priests (for so many were assembled each recurring week, even on ordinary occasions), and all the ecclesiastical authority of the land, sweep through the vast court, turning neither to the right nor left, overturning the tables on which were piled in one corner heaps of gold and silver, while over the rest of the wide surface, as is the custom, was spread the glittering coin, dazzling to the eye.

On the marble pavement of the court, as a rushing stream, the money was "poured out ;"* not a man daring to make the least resistance, but as sheep they were driven out of the temple. That the scourge was used as a rod upon their backs is not absolutely asserted. It may have been but as a symbol in the hands of Christ, while the very look of Jesus, gathering darkness like a storm on the face of the sky, would be in itself sufficient to appall the stoutest hearts, and make them feel that "the day of the Lord had come," that "it was nigh at hand; a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness."† Let a sudden peal of thunder be heard at noonday out of a clear sky, let a sudden trembling shake the ground, let some devouring tempest send forth its deluge of waters, submerging the land, overflowing the usual limits, and hiding every ancient landmark, pouring along with irresistible fury, and see if men do not turn pale with dread affright, fleeing as though the avenger of blood was upon their track. Think, then, what must have been the general dismay at the angry presence of him who, until now all gentleness and love, is clothed with thunder as with a garment, and issues forth as with his thunder-bolts in his right hand to execute judgment, and as an overflowing scourge "to be a swift witness against all who turn aside from the right."* None lingered, none resisted.

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* John 2. 13, 17.

† Joel 2. 2.

Those who have the care of the oxen and the sheep soon disappear with the cattle out of one of the gates that lead from the outer court ; the coin is gathered up and returned to its owners ; the innocent doves are gently removed by their keepers, and the court restored to its proper use.

What a stillness, what a silent awe and trembling must have followed this display of divine power. What cannot Omnipotence do when the arm of the Lord puts on strength ? All Jerusalem must have felt the shock, with more perhaps than a million of strangers, for the most part Jews by birth, though dwelling in other and distant lands. Where was the priest now ? Cowering in a corner, or hid in some secret place, dreading the light, and shrinking from the presence of one who, with but a rod or scourge in his hand, had "put to flight the armies of the aliens" and vindicated his claim as rightful master of his house, at the same time once more beautifying the place of his sanctuary ; giving, by this exhibition of his power in the sight of all the people, strangers and foreigners, and native Jews, in the very stronghold and citadel of Judaism, and in the city of the great King, an incontestable proof of his Messiahship.

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* Mal. 4. 5.

CHAPTER III.

BETHANY.

NOT simply did Jesus show his "great power" (a prelude of what he will do in the "consummation of all things,") in the purgation of the temple, but as the fame of his miracles in Galilee had preceded him, many also were the mighty works which he did in Jerusalem, not only during the feast, but afterward, while he tarried in and around the city. There can be no doubt of their miraculous character, from the impression which they produced, not only upon the multitude at large, but upon all classes of society, the intelligent, the influential, the wealthy, the refined. One person in particular, of the highest standing, and a member of the Sanhedrin, or Jewish senate, in a conversation with Jesus, admitted that his works were beyond the power of man, "for," said he, "no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."* They proved, indeed, to those who saw them—who were present when he performed them—who were witnesses of the same—that "God was with him."†

Neither are we by any means to form a low estimate of the judgment of the common people, "the men of the earth," as the dignitaries among the Pharisees contemptuously called them. They are not to be classed with the ignorant rabble of Rome, a class which, at this time, if they were but entertained with the games of the circus, and received, at the gate of some wealthy nobleman's palace, by the hands of his household steward, their regular distribution of bread, cared for little beside. Far otherwise was it with the laboring and inferior class of a Jewish community; the study of their law was a duty imposed upon them without regard to rank or condition. The simplest peasant in the land was as much obligated to study the law of Moses as the king on his throne, the judge on the bench, or the functionary in any department of civil service. All could read and write; all were taught the law from early childhood. This could not fail of itself to give elevation to their ideas, comprehensiveness to their minds, and to place them high in the social scale.

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* John 3. 2. † Acts 10. 38.

All classes were more or less leavened with this lump, even in those periods of decline, both civil and religious, which marked various portions of their strange and eventful history. We can judge somewhat of the effect produced by this general if not universal training of the young and tender mind among the Jews, when they dwelt together as a commonwealth in their own land, in the case of a peasant lad, a shepherd boy, who had no other facilities of education than those of any boy of his class in life—we mean the youthful David. All ages and classes have been instructed and delighted by his strains. From whence did he draw this living water which has quenched the thirst of so many souls, wearied and pained with privation, toil and disappointment, but from that full and ever-open fountain which was not only accessible to all of his countrymen, but of which all were strictly required to drink. They quaffed from the well of life itself. They drank, not from the Pierian spring, not the Castalian fount, but from the very well-spring of life and knowledge itself.

Doubtless there never was a people so instructed in all things appertaining to life and godliness as this people ; and consequently there never was, on the whole, such a body of close and critical observers as those who now scanned the pretensions of Jesus, and with scrutinizing eyes closely surveyed the wonderful miracles, countless almost as are the drops of the morning, which everywhere and under all circumstances, in the most public manner, and amid the pressure of vast crowds of spectators, were performed by our Lord during the comparatively short period of his active ministry on the earth.

Of course those now performed in the city of Jerusalem and its environs were carefully examined, especially as, like the fresh leaf on the olive tree, they were regarded as the harbinger, the first fruits of the Messiah's day. The prophets had foretold this of Christ, and in this respect, unlike his forerunner (for John did no miracles), he no sooner began to preach, and to announce the long-expected kingdom of God as at hand, than these signs, these wonder-works of God, accompanied him wherever he went, from Cana of Galilee to Capernaum and the region round about, thence to Jerusalem, and throughout the land of Judea proper. The effect they produced was very great ; the multitude that had followed John, now like a current changing its impetuous course, followed Jesus, insomuch that the disciples of John (who still continued his ministry along the Jordan) said to the latter "all men come to him."*

The tide had turned; the name of Jesus was on every lip; "many believed in his name;"† professed themselves his disciples; and such as had not been baptized by John now passed through that sacred rite of initiation, Jesus empowering his own disciples to do what John was first commissioned to perform. No doubt the scene in the temple had much to do with this. The display of the power of Christ; the amazing superiority shown by him on this occasion over the Sanhedrin itself—that dreaded and powerful body—all conspired to place Jesus on an elevation so high that all other authority was as nothing just now, in the eyes of the great body of the people.

From the scant narrative at this point we infer that the reception of Jesus as the Messiah was so warm and cordial, and at the same time so general, that the people at this particular juncture were ready to crown him King, and accept him as their great deliverer. But Jesus, knowing full well that they did not understand his mission, and that, from the exhibition of his power in the temple, they had formed wrong conceptions of the way to the kingdom, and that after the delirium of the moment had passed away they would vacillate, was not led away by their enthusiasm, and consequently did not accede to their overtures. Hence we read that he "did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men."* Had the Lord been actuated by any of those low motives which many are so ready to impute to him, had he been other than what he was, he would have availed himself of this spring flood in his affairs, and carried onward on the tide of fortune, have accepted the kingly crown, as had already been done by more than one pretender within the last thirty years.

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* John 3. 26. † John 2. 23.

Though a King, and born to a kingdom (we mean in a literal sense in the future of our earth), yet through his ministry this did not so much engage his attention as that development of spiritual life which was so absolutely essential to the forming of true and lineal subjects for that Kingdom which was to come.

Did he not, in his disciples, rebuke their worldly aspirations? Did he hold out to them any hopes of earthly honor or gain? Did he promise them anything but hatred, persecution, contempt and death? Was this the way to gain allies, adherents? Was there anything of worldly policy in any proposals he made, in any of his plans? Did he not repel all offers looking to worldly advantages for himself and his followers? When at one time, in the district of Herod Philip, the country governed by him mildly and justly, the people were resolved to make him king whether he would or not, did he not take himself away from them, so that when they would have laid hands upon him, by some invisible means he had conveyed himself out of their sight? Does this look like ambition? Had he chosen, like many others, to have availed himself of his unbounded popularity, and have established such rule as he pleased, was not here the opportunity?

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* John 2. 44.

Nothing was farther from the mind of Jesus than this. Yet there are those who, in the absence of all ground for such an assumption, yea, with the most direct evidence to the contrary, impute to him more or less of human policy, for the furtherance of earthly schemes.

Strange delusion! Did Jesus ever point to anything in the future of his earthly life but its fatal termination by the Romans, with every surrounding that could make it dark, distasteful, and ignominious? Oh no. Never was there a moment of his existence that the cross did not stand in full view of his perfected vision. Was this the man to lay plans, to concoct schemes for his own personal aggrandizement?

When he had purged the temple, rising up in his immortal strength, and was afterward asked for a sign why he did so—thereby questioning his right or authority for a proceeding in their eyes so contumacious (this was after their fears had subsided) he gave no other reply than a reference to his resurrection on the third day; showing that even then, amid the glory of that hour, he had chiefly in view, not earthly grandeur, not the deliverance of his country from the Roman yoke, but his own death and burial; and the consequent quenching of all hopes, to human view, while his body lay in the tomb. To these questioners, these insidious foes, he said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."*

After the Passover, Jesus went throughout all Judea, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, calling on men to repent, and doing good.

It is by no means improbable that in the course of his walks around the environs of the city, Jesus formed the acquaintance of the family at Bethany, a family so dearly loved and so highly honored. Here in this sweet retirement and amid this small family circle of a brother and two sisters, one of these by name Martha, the elder sister and head of the house, that is, its chief female manager, he found a home, such as, in view of all the surrounding circumstances, he found nowhere else. Among the many that believed on his name during this visit to Jerusalem and Judea, were, it is most likely, these three persons. What more probable than that they should invite Jesus to their pleasant home so near the city, and that he should accept the invitation? Thus happily he became domesticated there; and it was ever afterwards as we know a home when he came up to Jerusalem to the feast: for it must be remembered that our Lord spent the greater portion of his time in Galilee; and that most of his "mighty works" were done in the three cities Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum: all situated, as we have seen, on the pleasant shore of the lake of Galilee.

Thither came, as we may reasonably suppose, when the shades of evening, after the short twilight, had covered the earth, Nicodemus, a ruler in Israel, one of the great Sanhedrin (there were lesser ones in all the principal cities of Galilee) seeking an interview with Jesus, and this secretly for fear of the odium that he might incur from his fellow members. Admitted to their most private circles, and aware of the hostility felt against both John and Jesus, himself but an inquirer after truth, understanding nothing of the true nature of the mission of Jesus, and blind as to the time, the set time, when he would establish his visible, earthly kingdom in our world, he was not as yet prepared to submit to the reproach of openly avowing himself a follower of the meek and lowly Jesus.

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* John 2. 19.

Indeed almost if not quite to the end Nicodemus seemingly kept his convictions to himself, so that the Pharisees might truly say of their body, "Have any of the rulers believed on him?" We need not therefore wonder at the secrecy of this visit of Nicodemus; Jesus found no fault; he did not caustically rebuke his timidity; his self love was not wounded by this reserve on the part of this ruler of the Jews: but he opened to him all his heart, and instructed him in the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. His mode of instruction, the kindness with which he received him, the patience he showed toward his spiritual blindness, the absence of any sharpness in his language because he came in so covert a manner, stealing to him with stealthy footstep by night, as if on some errand of darkness, brings to light that feature in his character, foretold by prophecy, "He shall not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." Was not this always prominent both in his speech and in all his actions? Was it not a charge brought often against him by the proud, self-sufficient Pharisee, that Jesus "received sinners," as if this were a crime of such magnitude as to deserve the severest reprobation? Thus in the present instance he did what he could to encourage Nicodemus, showing thereby as in many another case that the prophecy of old time did not belie this trait in the loving character of Jesus, and was justified thereby.

In speaking of the kingdom of God, in this ever memorable interview, we suppose our Saviour had reference primarily to the throne of David which he was eventually to establish, but not now; and to undeceive Nicodemus in regard to his present anticipations of an earthly King, of a Ruler who should override the Roman power, he laid the greatest stress on spiritual qualifications, on the great work of soul regeneration, as the preparation necessary to constitute fit subjects for Christ's coming kingdom. There is a work to be done in us first, as well as for us, ere the time shall come for God a second time to "restore the kingdom to Israel."

Christ's sacrificial death comes in here; and on this broad and sure basis it will ultimately be established. Nicodemus, in common with all his countrymen, was looking for a present realization of his dearest hopes and fondest wishes in an earthly kingdom. That would come in due time, but for the present the kingdom must be within: in other words there must be such an inward change as corresponding to the angelic announcement will tend, by bringing forth all the fruits of righteousness in those who are subjects of it, to produce "peace on earth and good will toward men." The one kingdom must precede and prepare the way for the other, as John prepared the way for Christ. But in the end, on the ground of his death, burial and resurrection, Jesus at his second coming in power and great glory will re-establish the kingdom of Israel, thus fulfilling to the smallest iota every word that he has ever spoken : for heaven and earth may pass away, but not one jot or tittle of what God has spoken shall pass away till all be fulfilled.

In the course of this conversation, so deeply interesting to every Jew, Jesus endeavors to assist Nicodemus to a true conception of his present work and mission on the earth, by showing him that so far back as the time of Moses, his death was foreshown, with the benefits flowing therefrom, by the figure or type of the brazen serpent lifted upon a pole in the wilderness, when they who were bitten by the fiery serpents by looking at it were healed ; the deadly venom was extracted, and their lives were saved. This, he assured Nicodemus, was a type of his death, which he must yet accomplish at Jerusalem. These words, doubtless, made a deep impression on the mind of this ruler of the Jews, and though it is most likely he did not then fully understand their deep and most significant import, yet afterward he did so (as the part he took in the burial of Christ shows), when all things concerning Jesus, word for word, were actually accomplished.

Were all these words spoken in the midst of the charmed circle of Bethany, Bethany at the foot of the Mount of Olives, in the valley at its base, its sides and hill-top then green and covered with olive trees, intermingled perhaps with the funereal cypress? Did they who composed this circle, with Nicodemus drink in these words—hearing but not yet understanding, any more than did the chosen disciples when Jesus essayed to draw the veil from their biassed and darkened minds?

We see clearly, almost from the very first, that the subject of his death occupied his mind. Its shadow encompassed him from the beginning. How little does this agree with any ulterior, selfish views on the part of Jesus; how exactly does it comport with the early declaration of John, that Jesus was the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world; and how completely does it harmonize with the final result, the scene on Calvary and the dying on the cross of Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world. His death was no after thought, nothing forced upon him; it had nothing to do with any human policy, either in its origin or design. It was voluntary, self-imposed; and as he assumed our nature of his own motion, so was his death on the cross in all its painful forms his own voluntary act.

Was there ever anything like this in the wide range of human experience? A man to come into our world for no other purpose than to die for it! And this not a fictitious hero exalted to a god after his death—but a truly divine person come directly from the heavenly world. There can be no mistake on this point. Jesus asserts it again and again, and if you disbelieve it, according to the divine record, you make him "a liar;" you put this brand on that spotless forehead. Oh it is the death of Christ, and that upon the cross, that we find everywhere most prominent throughout the sacred writings. It is this that binds the whole together, as by a threefold cord which cannot possibly be broken. It was with direct reference to his death upon the cross that Jesus said, "I proceeded forth and came from God."* And now that he is about to die, thus "finishing" up his work on the earth, he returns to God. Jesus does not hesitate to say this to Nicodemus, in the most unqualified manner, though what he had just before said concerning his coming earthly kingdom in a far-off day, made almost too great a tax on his faith. Nevertheless, undeterred by his ignorance and blunders, knowing at the same time his sincerity, Jesus proceeds to draw the veil aside, and to assure him, in the most positive manner, that inasmuch as he "came down from heaven" to die, so having fulfilled his purpose, his "strange act," he was about to return from whence he came. Thus he speaks: "If I have told you earthly things" (referring to what he had just before said of the throne and kingdom of David to be hereafter established, not now), "and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" (Things infinitely more wonderful.) "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven."† Then follows the declaration of his death, as prefigured by the serpent which Moses lifted up in the wilderness.

Thus we find how closely connected is the fact that Jesus actually, in very deed, "came down from heaven"* with his death and resurrection; the one cannot be separated from the other. So that if the sacrificial death of Christ is wonderful, equally wonderful, if not more so, is it, that before Abraham was Jesus existed; and that, leaving the glory of heaven behind, turning away from the adoration which he received there amid angelic hosts and the spirits of the just made perfect, he should assume our nature—having been born of the virgin Mary—should suffer and die, "dying for our sins, and rising again for our justification."

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* John 8. 42. compared with John 13. 3.

† John 3. 12, 13.

Thus was the whole arcana of the heavenly world opened to the dazzled vision of Nicodemus, a man of the sect of the Pharisees, that all-powerful and influential sect, and "a ruler of the Jews," that is, a member of the great council of the nation.

And whatever any man may say to the contrary, however human reason may oppose, or the scorner rail, you may as well attempt to shake the pillars that uphold the universe, to alter the course of the heavenly bodies, to turn day into night, or move the fixed stars from their centers, or change the seasons, springtime, summer, and winter, or cause the rivers that run into the sea to flow backward, as in any wise to remove from its immutable center the death of Christ, expiatory in its nature, and around which every other fact of divine revelation steadfastly and constantly revolves, as the planets round the sun.

Take this away—the pivot on which all turns—this centripetal and centrifugal force, and instantly chaos comes again; darkness returns; light, the first-born of earth, expires; and the whole spiritual creation and arcana of God falls into nothingness. As a wandering star, the flash that momentarily illumined life's pathway for us, passes away, disappears, goes out, leaving behind it greater darkness than ever; man's best, sweetest, and surest hopes expire as with a breath, nothing but the blackness of utter night remaining, save perhaps the glimmering taper light of human reason, which in the ages past led so many astray, and which the loftiest minds of antiquity acknowledged was insufficient to satisfy their aspirations, or to unfold to them that knowledge of God and futurity which was so essential to answer the pleading demands of their spirittual being, their immortal nature.

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* John 6. 33, 38, 51, 62, and 16. 28.

CHAPTER IV.

SAMARIA.

As THE fairest flowers oft bloom in the desert, and nature seems to waste some of its sweetest fragrance in solitary and unfrequented places, so we have in the record of Christ, as we have seen in the case of Bethany, many lessons falling from his lips when his auditors were few—in the absence of the multitude—when all was hushed and still, and all influences from without were wanting. So have we seen water breaking out in some sylvan spot, some grove or wood, the limpid stream running softly along, fringing the banks with gayly colored flowers; some overhanging willow, or wayside bush, or blossoming vine kissing the glassy wave; and all this bloom and beauty, and music of the waters, reserved for the few who seek out nature in her more covert retreats, gazing entranced, or stepping on tiptoe so as not to disturb a leaf or drown the sound of running water, or the hum and whir of the musical bees; and adoring the while the hand which lavishes everywhere its inexhaustible stores, as freely as if a world of spectators were present to admire the scene.

And as we often find in our excursions some of the most beautiful spots thus hidden from observation, so some of the deepest discourses of Christ Jesus our Lord, those which unfold most fully and clearly his divine nature, which bring out truths most hidden from the common mind, are those which were, frequently, delivered to the smallest number of listeners—by the wayside perhaps—or in the privacy of a household—or in the society of his twelve chosen disciples—and occasionally when but three of them were present. And we have in the choice of the three admitted to his closest intimacy and sharing his especial manifestations, farther proofs, if more were needed, of his possessing in all respects our common humanity.

The remarkable success that attended the first public visit of our Lord to Jerusalem, the number of his followers by baptism, the crowd that attended his footsteps, the vast influences that he swayed, the numerous miracles which he wrought, that could not be gainsaid, that such a mind as that of Nicodemus acknowledged to be of God, and evidently beyond the power of any mere man, all conspired to arouse the Pharisees (we refer to the leading men among them—for nearly all the common people were of this numerous sect), to kindle their wrath, and to excite, even at this early stage of his ministry, the most deadly hostility to Christ. They were not of those who could see power passing out of their hands, their influence waning, and sit down bearing complacently the loss.

The scene in the temple, among the money-changers, the authority which Jesus showed, the vanquishing of all opposition, the utter inability of the Sanhedrin, aided by the whole body of priests and Levites, to cope with him, alone and single-handed, mortified them to the last degree. And so violent was their rage, so bitter their animosity, that Jesus retreated before the storm, and sought safety and quiet in his favorite region of Galilee. There were it is true, as we have observed, in all the cities of Galilee, branches, or smaller bodies of this great council (of which the nobleman whose daughter Jesus raised from the dead was a member), but they were by no means so effective in their operations as the main body in Jerusalem. Removed from the great central body, more moderate in their zeal, they seem to have left the road for the most part free to Jesus, so that when not safe in Judea he found here a secure asylum. But chiefly on the shore of the lake he walked, as we all know—that shore trodden so often by his footsteps, consecrated by his presence, and made dear forever as his earthly home.

Returning then to Galilee, leaving Jerusalem and Judea and the shore of the Jordan, Jesus with his disciples wends his weary way on foot, not hastily, moving toward his northern home. He had already reached that particular spot which of old belonged to the princely Sheckem, chief of the Amorites, which Jacob said he won from them by his sword and bow, and gave as an additional portion to Joseph and his sons. The Samaritans now held it, claiming it as coming from their ancestors, at first a mongrel population, partly Jews and partly heathen or unbelievers, since the Babylonish captivity. But time had made them homogeneous; one and all had adopted the Jewish faith; they only differed from the other Jews in their reception of the five books of Moses as of divine inspiration. This was sufficient for the establishment of their faith, though it is by no means likely that they rejected in toto the prophets and the rest of the holy writings. This would seem to be impossible, as the connection between them was so strong. But the Jews par eminence, as they deemed themselves, did none the less reject them from their brotherhood, and with characteristic intolerance, accounted them as much worse than the heathen, with all their vileness and degradation. A spirit this wholly at variance with that which animated their lawgiver, and pervaded their sacred books; a spirit which Jesus rebuked both by word and action. Far from him was any such narrowness and illiberality. And as all those writings which the Jews received and embodied in one book, called the Holy Scriptures, emanated from him, we may be sure that there was nothing in them to countenance such a feeling as this, to beget such rank intolerance. The love of Jesus pervades every part alike of those sacred books, and is in reality no more absent from the Old than from the New Testament. How could this be, seeing that one mind, and that an infinite, all-loving mind, dictated both, inspiring holy men to write them, and tracing God's love as well as showing forth his power from the foundation of the world.

It was noon as Jesus wearied with his journey, sat down "on the well" to rest, doubtless under the shade growing on the side of Mount Gerizim, at the foot or base of which was (and still is) Jacob's well, "sunk into the living rock,"* from which the patriarch himself drank "and his children and his cattle."†

Alone he sat, sheltered from the mid-day heat, musing, his disciples having all gone to Sychar, a city of Samaria a mile or so distant from the well. All was still; solitude reigned around in the absence of the hum of men, and the sound of labor. The laborers perhaps were reposing at noontide from their work; the shepherds reclining by their flocks; the oxen in rich pasture lying down on the green grass. At an unusual hour of the day, as it would seem, a woman of Samaria came to the well with her pitcher for water. She was from the city, for to the city she returned after her interview with Christ.‡ Hard-

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* Durbin's Travels in the East, vol. 2. p. 17.

† John 4. 12. ‡ John 4. 28.

[illegible]

ly had she approached the well, when Jesus addressing her asked for a drink of water, a most strange and wholly unexpected request for a Jew to make of a Samaritan. The request to us seems to be a very simple thing; but when we consider the impassable barrier raised by hate and the strongest prejudice, the work not of years but of centuries, between the two nations, it is impossible to over-estimate its importance. It is almost like the first creative word "Let there be light!" It is as if two hands were stretched over the wide ocean, meeting midway in the pathless sea, and exchanging the first friendly grasp.

Never, scarce, was there such animosity as between these two believing nations, arising solely from religious rivalry. No harder thing could a Jew say of Christ than this: "Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil."[*] To express their detestation they were called Cutheans, and their city "Sychar,"[†] both names not simply of contempt, but of infamy. It was no small matter, no light step to take, for Jesus to stand in this wide open breach; to close up this yawning chasm by an act of self-sacrifice greater than that of Curtius, the Roman patriot; to speak the first word, to make the first friendly overture to this woman of Samaria, thus opening a door of reconciliation, and paving the way for future amity and the progress of the gospel of the Kingdom. He stood alone in this unheard of act. He made himself a mark for all the arrows shot from the bow of an archer insatiate, relentless, almost as death. Well might the woman express the greatest surprise, and wonder at the advance of Jesus ; but there was power in that one word, the power of an all-superabounding, world-wide, embracing love. Jesus came on the highest of all missions ; to knit men's hearts together in love, and to form the kindliest brotherhood of all the nations of the earth, much more to cement in love two such nations as the Jews and Samaritans, so nearly allied by a common faith, and both looking with intense solicitude for the same almighty Saviour.

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[*] John 8. 48.

[†] Sychar, "a drunken city."

The conversation, once begun, is soon diverted into the channel nearest the Saviour's heart, his Messiahship. From the perfect and intimate acquaintance which Jesus showed with her domestic relations, a knowledge which, considering that he was a Jew, not one of her own countrymen, having no visible means of access to her dwelling, or of discovering a secret buried deeply perhaps in her own bosom ; hidden it may be for the time from all the world ; (unless indeed under the Jewish law it was a case of allowable concubinage,* which, considering the estimation in which she was held, seems most likely), she was persuaded that Jesus was a prophet, and as such entitled to her highest reverence. As one well read in Scripture, who had studied prophecy, who was even then looking for the coming of the Messiah, this conviction could not fail to produce a strong impression on her mind.

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* Concubinage—an inferior marriage, as that of Hagar with Abraham ; allowed by the Roman laws ; and in Germany at the present day.

The Samaritans as well as the Jews were looking for this great event, and anticipating great results from his coming. Her views stretched forward to this time; her vision was not bounded. Little however did she dream that Jesus the Messiah, the promised Shiloh, was before her, and that it was with him she talked. Yet she must have felt a strange warmth as she listened to his life-giving words, and gazed on a face more divine than any of mortal mould. Her antipathies were fast passing away; the wall of prejudice was breaking down; she began to see with new eyes, to hear with new ears; what words are these that he speaks?

She had read in Jeremiah of God, the great and dreadful God, so spoken of by Daniel, as "the Fountain of living waters," and here is one in human form, who having detected the secrets of her heart and life; having made known the manner of her life, and traced its history over many years, enumerating the various changes through which she had passed in her diversified career, many of them sad and deeply afflictive, now announces himself as the source of life and health, the perennial fountain of all good, nay, as being himself in us the living spring, "a well of water springing up into everlasting life."* What mean these words? Who ever heard the like? Are they the words of truth and soberness—or is it language of the wildest fanaticism? Who dare arrogate to himself what belongs solely and exclusively to Him who made the heavens and the earth? But his manner is placid, though earnest. He speaks in a calm, low tone of voice. There is no excitement. His audience is a single woman. He aims at nothing but the announcement of himself in an unmistakable manner as the Messiah. Up to this time Jesus had avowed nothing.

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* John 4. 14.

When John was questioned as to whether he was the Messiah, he answered decidedly, "No;" and this in a manner so emphatic and unequivocal as to leave no room for doubt; at the same time he pointed to Jesus as the Messiah. In Galilee, and in Jerusalem, in the presence of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus had spoken, not with words, but by his mighty acts. But here in Samaria, among a people shut out by the Jews from the covenanted mercies of God, and sent by them to perdition in a future world, alone with a woman of Samaria (we dare not say of questionable reputation, for this seems wholly to disagree with the facts in her case, her standing and influence in the city), he speaks of himself in a manner so sublime, so unlike anything he had yet said, and this on the very threshold of his great work, as to fill one with love, awe, wonder and admiration.

But before the avowal of his Messiahship was made, the woman, led along by the depth and sincerity of her own convictions, conscious that she was speaking with a man of God, one sent with a commission from on high, questioned him concerning the true place of worship, Gerizim or Jerusalem, a point long in dispute. But Jesus decides this at once, and this in favor of the holy city and of Mount Moriah, and of the temple then standing (the rival temple that once stood on Mount Gerizim having long since been destroyed,) on that sacred hill.

"Ye worship," said Jesus, "ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews;"* of the royal tribe of Judah, and through the line of David, and from the town of Bethlehem must Messiah come; the Samaritans were not Jews as the regular descendants of Abraham, the father of the faithful; and whatever may betide, for weal or woe, respecting the Jewish nation, nothing can, or ever will, alter the predetermined counsel of God. Let the world go as it will, let faith waver as it may, the Jews will yet be exalted before all nations; whatever their present status, however sunk in position as a nation, or even divided among themselves as to their future destiny, nothing can or will alter the fiat of the Almighty; through them must come, in some form or other, as intermediary, the salvation of the whole world.

In the same breath, as with the voice of the High and Holy One that inhabiteth eternity, Jesus announces the passing away of the Jewish ritual, the abolition of the Aaronic priesthood (declared to be everlasting—but in a limited sense of that word), the end of the temple worship, with all its gorgeous magnificence and its endless ceremonial offerings. Could this have been foreseen at the time? Even when the hour of destruction came, Titus, the Roman general, did all he could to save the temple; but vain were his efforts; he could not avert its ininevitable doom. It fell, and with its fall came the full accomplishment of the words of Jesus as addressed to the woman of Samaria.

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* John 4. 22.

A new worship was to arise ; not in its essence different from the worship of the temple, but simple in its form, not burdened with ceremonial rites ; in which the soul would be free, free as a bird flying through the air ; yet spiritual, leading the soul captive in silken chains ; but built on the same old and sure foundation, Christ Jesus the Lord being then, now and ever the chief corner-stone, elect, precious and tried.

We cannot but think that the declaration which followed the amazing announcement of the final close of the Jewish ritualistic dispensation, which had now lasted, with a short intermission, some two thousand years, and which at this time gave no sign of weakness or decay, was one of the most, if not the most remarkable (considering the circumstances in which he was placed) ever made by Jesus. And you must either impeach the veracity of the most just man that ever lived, or admit that he was laboring under a mental delusion, an admission wholly at variance with the tenor and philosophy of his whole life. While this sincere and earnest minded woman's faith was wavering, trembling in the balance, hardly knowing what to believe, but leaning perhaps towards Jesus as the Messiah, in language peremptory, plain, simple, explicit, undeniable, Jesus said, "I THAT SPEAK UNTO THEE AM HE."* Once after this to the man who had been born blind, and whose eyes our Lord had opened, and this time also to himself alone, he spoke in a manner equally explicit, the poor fellow as ready to believe as the woman of Samaria, only waiting for a little more light, "Thou hast both seen him," (with your newly opened eyes) "and it is he that talketh with thee."* It was we believe (we may be mistaken in this) not until the solemn appeal made by the High Priest, as he stood before the Sanhedrin as on a criminal arraignment, and was adjured by him to say plainly whether he was indeed Messias, that is called Christ or not, that he made an absolutely public avowal of his Messiahship; making this avowal in the presence of the whole assembly, and under circumstances to other than a true man most fearful and trying. "I adjure thee," said the High Priest, "by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." "Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said:" (equivalent to a direct affirmation, and so understood by the High Priest, and Jews in council) "Hereafter ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."†

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* John 4. 26.

Thus we see that what was told in secret was proclaimed on the house top, and this from the lips of Jesus himself: his words to be attested first by an event then near at hand, though, to all human appearance, most unlikely to happen, nothing more so, the abolition of the Jewish ceremonial law, with all its imposing rites and ceremonies, even to the discontinuance of the daily sacrificial offering; and second, by a great event in the far distance, no less an event than his second coming in the clouds of heaven to judge the world, and to consummate his mission to our earth, as the Jews were wont once to speak of the Messiah, by "restoring all things."

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* John 4. 27. † Matt. 26. 63, 64.

At this interesting point came the disciples from the city, having gone thither "to buy meat," and interrupted the interview. At once the woman, "leaving her water pot," in her anxiety to communicate the news, and spread the joyful tidings, hastened to the city, and going swiftly from house to house, and from one man to another, as she met them in the streets or on the way, rehearsed to them her simple story, and such was the credence with which it was received, owing partly, as it would seem, to the estimate in which she was held, and the sincerity with which it was told, and the divine influence which must have accompanied her words, that conviction fastened at once on many minds; no time was lost, and we read that "many of the Samaritans of that city (Sychar) believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did."* The result was that in the course of the two following days, while Jesus, at their urgent request, tarried with them, discoursing of the things concerning himself and his kingdom (but performing no miracles, no, not even one), many more of the Samaritans believed, and joined themselves to him, saying, "For we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."†

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* John 4. 39. † John 4. 42.

BOOK FIFTH.

CHAPTER I.

RETURN FROM JERUSALEM AND JUDEA TO GALILEE—NAZARETH.

In his intercourse, so friendly and familiar, with the Samaritans, Jesus had broken through by a bold and decided step, overleaping the hate and almost insurmountable prejudices of several centuries, one of the chief barriers to the spread of his gospel in the land of Israel, and among those who ought of right to be brethren. In doing this he had given the preference to the Jews, as a people specially chosen of God, to whom belonged before all others the promises relating to the Messiah, and the salvation flowing to all mankind through his name. The Jews are always uppermost in the mind of Jehovah; he never forgot (neither has he to this day) the promises made to the fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As Zacharias sang, on the day of the circumcision of John, "the prophet of the Highest," the child of his old age, "God remembered his holy covenant, the oath which he sware to Abraham,"* thereby giving a double sanction to his word, a certain pledge, an absolute assurance of its literal fulfillment through all their generations. But while doing this, he is not unmindful of the claims of other nations, but beginning first at home, within his own fair domain, he shows his great love to the Samaritans; takes them to his bosom; folds them in his arms, and makes them part and parcel of himself.

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* Luke 1. 72, 73.

In Galilee, in Nazareth of Galilee, he takes another step outside of that narrow enclosure in which the Jews had entrenched themselves so long; a narrow-mindedness, a national exclusiveness, arising not from the law or the prophets, but from their misconceiving and misapplying the spirit and letter of the law, and not perceiving even in the sonorous language of Isaiah how the salvation of Israel was blended with the glory of the Gentiles. If we needed any additional testimony that Jesus was truly the Jewish Messiah, the stand he took toward the Gentile world, his all-embracing love to them, would furnish it. Did the rest of his countrymen stand aloof from them? Did he not open wide the gate and invite them one and all to a participation of the privileges and blessings of his gospel? Whom did his great commission exclude? Are not his last words still ringing in our ears? Is one human being left out? Were not his loving and faithful disciples directed to preach the gospel, to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation to every creature? And did they not sacredly carry out his injunction, "beginning first at Jerusalem?" This was the sole reservation.

In the course of our Lord's journeyings and teachings at this present time, throughout Galilee, after his return from Jerusalem, as he passed from one place to another, from village to village and from city to city, he came at length to Nazareth, his native city, town or village. Of course his fame had preceded him. What had transpired at Jerusalem was known; it could not have been otherwise, and great was the interest, all-absorbing, that his presence excited. But this was not all. They had known him from his childhood; they had seen him pass through the different stages of childhood and youth to early manhood. They knew his family, Joseph his father and Mary his mother, his four brothers, James, Joses, Juda and Simon; also his sisters.* Probably the lineage of the family was not generally known, that it was of the line of David. We cannot, however, speak positively on this point. But they had marked his youth, his growing years, and this with ever-increasing favor and love and wonder. But now he comes among them, after a comparatively short absence, not much if any over six swiftly passing months, and the whole land is moved at his presence, from one end to the other.

From Capernaum especially had come the reports of his many and wonderful works. The old home is there still, once graced by an angelic visitant, even the angel Gabriel, with tidings direct from the throne of God. His sisters were there still; they had not left it; they had remained quietly at home during the temporary absence of the rest.†

* Mark 6. 3. † Ibid.

All meet again—and for the last time—under the old, time-worn roof. Jesus, the Son of Man, is there; one of the number as of old; he who "came down from heaven,"* as the Jews affirmed that he said. And when the Sabbath came round, that sacred day, Jesus, according to his "custom" was found in the synagogue, the synagogue, probably, in which he had often sat down of a Sabbath in former years, as a child, a youth, a man. There were there, no doubt, seated on the highest seats, the place of honor, many of the elders, by whom he had long been known; familiar were their faces; the sound of their voices was familiar to his ears. Time had left its well-known marks on their faces in the lapse of years; but still the sight of the eye was strong; their vigor had not much abated. Then how many were there who had grown up with him; their years keeping pace with his own. There were also present on this occasion the members of his own family, those who had seen and known him always; living with him under the same roof, sitting at the same table, knowing of his outgoings and incomings. Above all, there was his mother, the virgin Mary, seated among the rest, who had been the recipient in the past of such wonderful revelations from heaven.

As Jesus rose to read, how great was the interest! how intense the excitement; and we can readily judge of the effect which was produced by the remarks which were made, as the people, lost in wonder, discoursed among themselves, exchanging opinions, at the close of the services of the synagogue. His family, education, humble condition, his father following the occupation of a carpenter, was as much a matter of surprise to his townsmen as to many of us, who make it a stumbling block in the way of his reception as the Messiah. How reconcile his high claims with his low origin? His wisdom indeed, the spell of his words, cannot be denied; but whence came this superhuman wisdom, this fascination of speech, this inconceivable persuasiveness: and above all this tone of authority, this air of command, so new, so all-powerful and compelling, (yet winning) which cast so far into the shade the dicta, the vain formulas of the most eloquent and learned of the Jewish doctors of the law? How tame the schools beside this unlettered Nazarene! What are we to make of it?

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* John 6. 42.

Thus discoursing, the tide of life swept along, as with us when some all-persuasive public teacher chains to his lips listening thousands, and they pour forth from open doors, into the streets, alleys, and lanes—when the mouth of the speaker is hushed, and the vast audience melts away, leaving silence and solitariness behind. But ere the day has passed, or perhaps as it is closing, (for we cannot conceive of Jews thus desecrating the Sabbath day), or it may be on some following day of the week* the tumult arose which ended in an attempt upon his life, but from which he delivered himself by his own miraculous power.

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* From the narrative it is plain Jesus spent several days in Nazareth; for we read, "And he could do there no mighty work, save that he laid hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them." Mark 6. 5.

The few miracles that he wrought in Nazareth, produced an unfavorable impression. They had heard by "the hearing of the ear" of what had been done in Capernaum, and they seem to have been offended because in his own country he did so little. His words were sweet; they could not but acknowledge that according to the Messianic Psalm of David, "grace was poured into his lips,"* but then the few that he had healed would bear no comparison with "the works they heard he had done in Capernaum."† This was the first ground of offence; they cast it up in his face by way of gibe, or challenge. In fact his reception in Nazareth was not friendly. As long as he grew up among them as "a tender plant," they had nothing to say against him; he was in favor with all, high and low, rich and poor; but now that he is among them in the character of the Messiah, they repudiate his pretensions, they reject him. Jesus in his own city, where the beauty of his youth had been seen and felt, where he had spent so many years, "holy, harmless as a dove, undefiled," had scarcely any following at all. This unfriendly feeling, this rejection, rising into hostility, was kindled into a flame, (as in the case afterward of the proto-martyr Stephen), by his showing that their unbelief, their contemptuous rejection of him, was the true reason why mighty works did not show themselves in him. Had they received him, accredited his mission with child-like simplicity, as

* Psa. 45. 2.

† Luke 4. 23.

for instance the Samaritans had done, the case would have been different. This was the reason, he informs them, in the past, why Elijah, rejected of his own people, his life hunted down, found refuge in the house of a woman that was not of their nation; and also that in the time of his successor, Elisha, God, passing by all the lepers in Israel, and they were not few but many, "none of them were cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian."* Rejected, persecuted, even their lives in peril by their own countrymen, these men of God, prophets of the Most High, turned to the Gentiles, and met with belief and a cordial reception. Of all things to anger the Jews, this preference in any case, under any circumstances, of a Gentile to a Jew, and this by one claiming to be their Messiah, was the least pardonable; they were filled with the most deadly rage, and rushing upon Jesus, they, as in the case of Stephen, "cast him out of the city,"† and would surely have taken his life, had he not like Samson, when bound with withes, rescued himself out of their hands: making himself invisible, their hands involuntarily gliding off from him, while he went unseen, unharmed, "through the midst of them, and so passed by."‡

We know to an absolute certainty what were the precise words used by Christ wherewith to introduce his ministry in Nazareth; and how he applied them without limitation or qualification directly to himself. They were these: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek: he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound: to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God: to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness: that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified."*

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* Luke 4. 27. † Acts 7. 58. ‡ John 8. 59.

In using these memorable words, did not Jesus, in the most unmistakable manner, avow himself, in the presence of his fellow-townsmen, on the first public occasion that presented itself, to be the Jewish Messiah? "This day," he said, "is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."† Could language be plainer or more pointed than this? Next, however, in importance to the annunciation of Jesus as the Messiah, is the connection of these words with the future of the Jewish nation. Simeon, one of the chosen and divinely taught witnesses to the birth of Christ, said of him at the time, "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel."‡ In close and regular connection with the words used by Christ in the commencement of his ministry in Nazareth, and their express reference to him as the Messiah, we have a most glowing picture, drawn at full length, of the future glory of Israel, of that illustrious day (yet to come) when this nation, after the lapse of many centuries, and when all the world have had full proof of its "fall," shall rise again, its plumage fresher and brighter than ever, and shall become "a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of her God."* It is hardly possible to depict in sufficiently strong colors, the overflowing prosperity that is yet to follow her long exile and banishment from the land of her fathers, and how the nations of the earth, forgetting their past enmity, and solicitous in some measure to repay the vast debt due to her, and partially wipe out the long record of injuries inflicted upon her, will rally to her aid, and unite in more than restoring her former greatness. "Gentiles shall come to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising."† Every "nation and kingdom" will contribute its powerful assistance to re-erect the kingdom of Israel; it will be upon the part of all a willing, not a forced service.‡ It will not be the work of one nation, or kingdom, but of all. This is the express word of prophecy, not the "private interpretation" of any one man, not theory, not human speculation. With this grand result, in using the words we have quoted for his text, Jesus identifies his Messiahship. The one cannot be detached from the other. It is true this culminating proof is not present with us; it is yet in the womb of time; but it will be forthcoming, perhaps, in an hour when it is not looked for. The nation as a whole (there will always be in the future as in the past a faithful few) may be untrue to itself, may abandon the faith of the fathers, and relinquish the hope of a restoration to their own land, and even of a coming Messiah, as obsolete ideas, not

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* Isa. 61. 1, 2, 3. † Luke 4. 21. ‡ Luke 2. 34.

*Isa. 62. 3. † Ibid. 60. 3. ‡ Ibid. ver. 12.

suited to these progressive times, but God will be true to his oath and promise.* He hath never yet said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye my face in vain; and he never will.

CHAPTER II.

CURE OF THE SON OF A RULER—A MEMBER OF THE COUNCIL IN THE CITY OF CAPERNAUM.†

On his way, perhaps, from Nazareth to Capernaum, after his expulsion from the former city, Jesus stops for a brief season at the village of Cana in Galilee, the home of Nathaniel. We may be sure he found a welcome here; though from its vicinity to Nazareth his mother had friends and acquaintances, and perhaps family connections in the place. Here she had been invited to a wedding, at the opening of the gospel narrative, and here Jesus had first displayed his power in turning water into wine. It was done by an act of omnipotence, in the absence of all human means, and in the presenc of his disciples, and the servants of the house, the number increased, probably, in consequence of the marriage festival. That the wine was genuine, as pressed from the fruit of the grape by the usual process, is evident from the language of the governor of the feast, who, having first tasted it, pronounced it to be of superior quality, of a finer flavor than any that had before been furnished, though the joyful celebration of the marriage had already lasted several days.

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* Read 52d chap. Isaiah; remembering that it refers primarily *not* to the Christian church, so called, but to the future of the Jewish nation.

† Each city had its sanhedrin or council, consisting of twenty-three members; the great council in Jerusalem for the whole nation was composed of seventy-two members.—Prid. Conn. vol. 2. p. 24.

While tarrying for a little season here, after the storm in Nazareth, perhaps staying at the house of Nathaniel, that loyal disciple, whose faith was so strong, and love so ardent, there came to him from Capernaum (having heard that Jesus was at Cana) one of the rulers of the Jews, a member of the council of twenty-three, in hot haste, consumed by anxiety for his son, who was lying at the point of death. This person, occupying as he did a prominent place in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, was, in all likelihood, present when Jesus, in the presence of the whole assembly, with a single word, spoken authoritatively, cast out the unclean spirit, to the wonder of all; also, when the evening of the same day had come, and the sun had gone down behind the mountains of Gilead, had seen multitudes of the sick of the city cured by Jesus; not a solitary case here and there, and this irrespective of the manner of disease by which they were afflicted; he had also probably been at the feast of the Passover, and had seen and heard Jesus there, what he did, and how he spake, in the very center, citadel, and stronghold of Judaism, rising as a pillar high above priest and Levite, and the authority of the Sanhedrin; thus fortified by proofs of the Messiahship of Jesus, with eager haste, in no doubtful state of mind, he comes to Jesus for relief, sure of success if he can be but so happy as to find him, and induce him to come at once to Capernaum to his house. His faith had not as yet attained the same strength as that of the Roman centurion, who at a later period in our Lord's ministry was fully assured that Jesus could cure, present or absent. Jesus tests the ruler on this point. His faith stands this test; for no sooner do the words pass our Lord's lips, "Go thy way, thy son liveth,"* than he grasps the life-giving spoken word as a sure support; his fears are all gone; a father's joy returns, and he hastens joyfully away, certain of finding the spoken word of Jesus, though at a distance from the place where his son was lying dangerously ill, amply verified. That nothing might be left to chance—for life at its lowest ebb sometimes spontaneously flows back to its source—on his way home, journeying at his leisure, but rejoicing as one who has found great spoil, the Jewish ruler met his servants on the way, and upon inquiry found that precisely at the very same hour Jesus pronounced the health-restoring, the life-giving word, "the fever left" his son, and "he began to amend."† So clear was this case to all immediately concerned —so satisfactory—that not only the ruler but his son, and all his house, including the servants, received and acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah.

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* John 4. 50. † Ibid. 4. 46—53.

Without doubt the news spread throughout the city, and increased the general desire to see Jesus once more. Thus more especially was the way prepared for the speedy return of Jesus to the three cities on the shore of the Sea of Galilee where "most of his mighty works were done:" making the rich and fertile plain of Gennesareth the most sacred, the sweetest, and dearest spot of the whole earth.

CHAPTER III.

THE CITY OF CAPERNAUM AND ITS ENVIRONS.

THE bay of Naples, at the time of Christ, previous to the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, whose fires had been so long smouldering that their record was lost, resembled somewhat the busy scene on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Fishermen and their boats lined the shore of the bay, as well as the villas of Roman noblemen, orators, soldiers, and poets. All was life and animation, Vesuvius indeed towering over the scene; but its fires apparently spent, its sides cultivated to the very summit. As a giant asleep it lay soft and still in its slumbers; though of late indeed it had given some faint intimation that its deadly throes were not yet quite over. Pompeii and Herculaneum lay at its feet, little dreaming of their coming fate. All was joy in these busy cities; the ruby wine sparkled in the foaming goblet; harlotry ran its course; and that purity of thought and life which Jesus taught found little countenance, as we may conceive from the tablets and pictures and painted walls and statuary brought to light by the excavation of these buried cities "in one hour made desolate."

In the offing, as a ship at anchor, in full view of Neapolis (Naples), rose to a great height the island of Caprea (Capri), at that very time the secluded residence of the then reigning emperor, Tiberius Cæsar. He was at this time just recovering from the fright occasioned by the conspiracy of his prime minister and most trusted friend and confidant, Sejanus. It was a struggle for life and death between the two; but Tiberius prevailed, and Sejanus fell a victim to his own arts, hurled in an instant from the height of power to the lowest point of infamy and disgrace.

The island was a salubrious and pleasant one in which to live—warmed by a genial climate in winter, cooled by a westerly breeze in summertime. Here Tiberius spent the closing years of his life and reign, after the death of Sejanus uncheered by the solace of a single friend, trusting no one, feared by all. His edicts carried death with them; for an obsequious senate obeyed his every mandate; and none escaped, whatever their merit or sevices, whom he denounced. The innocent and the guilty both fell before his all-withering decrees, issued from one of his twelve villas on the island. Slowly and miserably he dragged out his last years; if a terror to others, no less a terror and foe to himself, seeking to the last in self-indulgence, in the gratification of his evil passions, some compensation for his sufferings and the abhorrence in which he was held.

There was with him at this time his grandson by adoption, Caius Caligula, (youngest son of Germanicus) who afterwards became emperor, succeeding to the empire upon the death of Tiberius. From the rocky heights of the island was seen the gay and crowded shore, village adjoining village, villas filling the vacant spaces, Neapolis in full view, the fleet at anchor near Misenum, Baiæ in sight, and the green promontory of Surrentum stretching out toward Caprea, leaving between it and the island a narrow channel of three miles. Across this channel boats flew light as arrows, landing their freight upon the shelving beach, which was the sole port of entrance to the otherwise inaccessible island.

Not a bay like that of Naples, but a lovely lake, hemmed in on all sides by high mountains, itself a glassy mirror, reflecting the azure sky, the encircling green hill-tops, washed the busy shore of Gennesareth, with its embowered houses scattered along the margin of the lake ; and the three villages of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, all but touching each other, interlocking their arms as in a close and loving embrace. Of all places, not even Jerusalem itself is dearer to the heart than these, for here was the home of Jesus the Saviour of the world, during the greater part of his active ministry ; and here, more than elsewhere, most of his mighty works were performed. Capernaum was most especially favored, no city so much so. This city chiefly was his home ; here possibly his mother, his brethren, and his sisters lived, after their final removal from Nazareth. From Capernaum he went forth on his various journeys through Galilee, now stopping at one city or village, now another, and anon returning home. At other times he would extend his journeys, going up to Jerusalem to the feasts—braving the anger of the Scribes and Pharisees—and when the storm grew too high, finding a sure retreat in Galilee from the malice and deadly hate of his enemies. Thus the years wore on until the time when he would flee no more, but freely gave himself up into the hands of those who were foredoomed to take his life.

CHAPTER IV.

MISSION OF THE TWO DISCIPLES OF JOHN THE BAPTIST TO JESUS IN GALILEE.

THE prison or fortress of Machærus, in which John was confined, overlooked the Dead Sea at its northern extremity, and served not only as a prison but as a palace; it was strongly fortified, and was occasionally visited by Herod Antipas and his court. A more desolate sight than that of the Dead Sea, with its bare and chalky mountains on either hand, rising far up into the vaulted sky, could not often be seen. Hardly ever did a footstep tread its deep sandy shore; no sail whitened its murky surface; no fish swam in its salted waters, and rarely did a bird fly over its sluggish expanse. The wind could raise these heavy waters till the white foam curled their tops, but they would sink and die away in a moment of time. A sullen uniformity, a leaden, lifeless calm, was their natural state, unrelieved by silvery brightness or gentle dash upon the shore. Dead and heavy, they rolled slowly upon the desolate strand, no soft, peaceful murmur breaking on the ear, but a moan as of lost spirits confined beneath the unexplored deep, was heard as the waves reached the silent untrodden shore. From the tops of the mountains on both sides, those of Moab and those of Judea, and through gullies and ravines made by the rush of waters, streams, and indeed in some cases almost rivers, poured bright and sparkling down the mountain side, but they met a cold embrace, and soon their beauty was lost, and their silvery trace effaced, as they emptied themselves into this mysterious sea.

John having been cast into prison, his disciples had free access to him; they appear to have gone in and out at their pleasure. There were lovely grounds around this fortress or prison; trees, and shady serpentine walks; grottoes and fountains, aviaries and porticoes, whatever could add to the agreeableness of a place which, while used as a prison, like the Asmonean palace overlooking the courts of the temple, combined all the embellishments and luxurious appliances of a princely mansion. John, it is very probable, instead of continual close confinement, during the day, at least, had free permission to walk in the garden, spending many an hour in pleasing converse with his immediate disciples, who did not forsake him in his hour of need. Many clave to him to the last, finding it difficult to receive even John's testimony, though it was so decided and so explicit, concerning the Messiahship of Jesus. Highly as they esteemed John, they knew not how to forsake him for Christ, especially as there was so little earthly prestige accompanying the appearance of the latter among his own people. But tidings of his great popularity and wonderful works came borne along with every wind, and John's disciples told him of what they heard, and the question was mooted anew, "Is Jesus truly the Christ?" In this case John acted as he did with Andrew, and John the evangelist. When on the banks of the Jordan he pointed these two disciples to Jesus as the Christ, they were not easily induced, even by the testimony of their master, to follow him; they moved slowly and reluctantly at first, and only believed after a night's interview with Christ. So now John, solicitous to advance the cause of his master, and enlist his own disciples in the ranks of Jesus, sends two of them to Galilee, to see and hear for themselves. That there was any doubt in John's own mind, his reiterated testimony evidences was not the case. That danger could have alarmed him, or clouded his mind, or confused his perceptions, is a supposition little in accordance with his prophetical character. Had danger deterred him he could easily have withheld his repeated asseverations to Herod Antipas respecting his unlawful connection with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. A soft word would have averted the danger from this source. But how would this have agreed with Christ's delineation of the courage and unyielding fidelity of his forerunner? Is he a trimmer—a courtier? Does the trumpet in his hands give forth an uncertain sound? Is he frightened at his own shadow? shaken by the first breath of an adverse wind? Surely not, if we pay any regard to the words of Christ. Many a prophet had perished in the past for the truth; hardly one that had not suffered a cruel death—some slain with the sword—others stoned to death—at the hands of their own countrymen; and is John, of whom Jesus had said, strongly emphasizing the words, that he was not only "a prophet," but "much more than a prophet,"* is he the first of the noble company of martyrs to shrink at the approach of danger, losing his memory and consciousness, forgetting the convictions of a lifetime, belying his own testimony, and showing a weakness, a love of life, and a timidity, wholly irreconcilable with all we know of him? We trust there are not many who think thus, though the language of the narrative, on the mere face of it, is somewhat ambiguous, and seems to favor such an incongruous interpretation.

It was while Jesus was journeying through Galilee, perhaps somewhere in the vicinity of the city of Nain, made ever memorable by raising the widow's son to life, as they were carrying him to the tomb, "the mourners going about the streets," that the two disciples of John came in contact with Jesus. He was at the time surrounded by a crowd of sick and impotent folk; and when they asked him, in the name of their beloved master, whether he was really the Christ, or were they still to look for another, he pointed to the cures which he wrought in their presence as proof sufficient and confirmatory that he was the Christ. He spake, and the blind saw, the lepers were cleansed, the dumb spake, the lame walked, the deaf heard, the dead were raised to life, and still more, and above all the rest, "to the poor the gospel was preached."* Our Saviour, on this occasion, instead of proceeding as he did at first with Andrew and that other disciple when sent to him on a similar errand by John the Baptist, to learn if Jesus was indeed the Christ, answered by his works; works wholly beyond human skill and power, and which doubtless carried full and complete conviction to these two sincere, inquiring disciples and followers of John the Baptist.

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* Luke 7. 26.

Upon their return they no doubt cheered the heart of their master with an account of what they had seen and heard. Of this they talked by the way as they journeyed joyfully back, praising God for what they had seen with their own eyes; such displays of power, indeed as none but God could perform, or such as he empowered to work the works of God. John was still alive, but his end was near. When the hour came it was without any previous preparation. The blow was sudden and unexpected. Up to the very last moment he had a friend in Herod Antipas. It is true, as the tide flowed toward Christ, and John was left comparatively with few followers, Herod, strongly urged by

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* Luke 7. 22.

Herodias, had imprisoned John the Baptist; nevertheless nothing was farther from his mind than to put him to death. But this is what he did. And so John perished from among men, to the great regret of him who, in part from a superstitious regard to his vow, still more from a feeling of pride, as vain and foolish as it was wicked, allowed him to fall a victim to the machinations, the malice and hatred of a woman infuriated by John's fidelity to the cause of God and truth. Gladly Herod permitted John's dear disciples to take charge of his body and give it burial. Whether they carried it to Hebron from the castle of Machærus, and placed it beside the remains of Zacharias and Elizabeth, we know not; it is likely enough they did; and if so, in this most ancient city, near to the cave of Machpelah, he had a pleasant resting place, after a life that knew no other joy than that of living to Christ, and announcing the new and glorious era that then broke, as the rising of the sun, upon our world.

Amid all John's greatness and earnest life-work, notwithstanding his knowledge of Christ, so deep, so profound, so far surpassing that of the apostles until after the resurrection, and his initiationof the rite of baptism by divine direction, he yet in some respects labored under a serious disadvantage in the fact that the Holy Ghost had not yet been given. In this respect the "least in the kingdom of God" is said by Jesus himself to be "greater than John the Baptist,"* that is after the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. Hence the stress which our Lord himself places upon this most important event. In the divine economy Christ shows that he himself could not be clearly and fully understood, his words in their most significant sense comprehended, his death and what it implied laid open to their understandings, until he should send them from heaven the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of truth, who should initiate them into these golden mysteries, unfold to them the depths of his divine nature, and pour a flood of light upon the greatest fact in the history of our world and the race of mankind, to wit, that the Word was actually "made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth."* Even Christ's own words, oracular as they were, fell, many of them, and these of the greatest "pith and moment," meaningless as an empty sound upon the ears of his disciples; they understood them not; neither were they cleared up, and their vague and shadowy sense made plain, until the promise of the Father was fulfilled in the actual descent of the Holy Ghost. The deficiency was not with John; there was no lack of knowledge on his part; he was "a burning and a shining light," according to the eulogium of our Lord, but the disadvantage under which he labored arose from the dispensation under which he lived. Any true believer on and after the day of Pentecost would have the aid of the promised Spirit of truth, to make known the things of Christ, especially the nature and end of the death of Christ, and apply them in a way and manner that could not be done before. It is in this sense, and in no other, that the expression, "the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he," is applied to John the Baptist.

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* Luke 7. 28.

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* John 1. 14.

Did not our Lord lay himself under the same restraint? Is not the absolute necessity of his departure from earth and return to heaven, placed by him on this ground? How puzzled were the disciples to construe many of his dark sayings until after the revelation of the Holy Ghost! Then a thousand scattered rays of light, collected together as in a focus, were poured upon their minds; then was the Father fully made known to them, and every enigma of the past solved. What had been so dark, especially in regard to the supreme Godhead of Christ, and his sacrificial death, was now clear and plain; the film was removed, and eyesight imparted alike to all, small and great, irrespective of persons, age, or condition.

In proof of what we have said we must cite the words of Christ himself: "Neverthess I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for, if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."* In a subsequent verse, Jesus says: "He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."† Again we read: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."‡ Inasmuch then as "the Holy Ghost was not yet given,"* even our Lord was in a sense restrained in his teachings; his disciples could not receive from his lips what they would learn by and by from the teaching of the Holy Ghost. Present with them, the disciples could indeed make some advance in divine knowledge; but not until after his departure from among them, and his bestowing upon them the gift of the Holy Ghost, as the result of his ascension into heaven, and sitting on the right hand of the majesty on high, could these as yet unripe disciples come, in the highest sense, to "the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."† Sitting at the feet of Jesus, talking with him by the way, listening to his discourses to the multitude, favored, in close, familiar intercourse, with his explanations of parables, they could learn so much and no more. How often, but in vain, especially as his end drew near, did Jesus attempt to depict his death on the cross, and the treatment he should receive at the hands of the Gentiles; and when questioned by Philip as to the Father, while most explicitly he replies, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,"‡ yet Philip and the other disciples were as ignorant of the true meaning of these words as if Jesus had not spoken them, and so remained until after the resurrection and the descent of the Holy Ghost. They saw men as trees walking, and it was especially with reference to the day of Pentecost, and the gifts that our Lord would then send down from heaven, that Jesus, speaking of their knowledge of the Father, said, "The time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father."*

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* John 16. 7. † Ibid. 16. 14. ‡ Ibid. 14. 26.

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* John 7. 39. † Ephes. 4. 13. ‡ John 14. 9.

John sustained precisely the same relation as this to his disciples. He could speak of the coming of the Holy Ghost as the fruit of the death of Christ on the cross, and of his burial and resurrection, and ascension into heaven; but he could not make his disciples or the men of Israel understand his work. It was the same to them as if they had never heard of the Holy Ghost: the key was wanting to unlock these sacred truths—to open this treasury of divine knowledge. In considering, therefore, "the testimony of Jesus," and determining his Messiahship, while we have the testimony of John his forerunner, the testimony of his works and that of the disciples, we have the weightier testimony of the Holy Ghost, kept back, reserved until the Son of Man had passed into the heavens. It is to this proof of his Messiahship, aside and apart from all that he said and did while upon the earth, Jesus referred, when, among some of his last words, he said, "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father,† he shall testify of me." This is the culminating proof of the Messiahship of Jesus. Proof hard to be gainsaid; and rendered the more pertinent from the fact that it was kept in abeyance until Jesus had passed away from the earth. John the Baptist was fully alive to this fact; he knew that Jesus, as he said, "had greater witness than that of John;"* hence he spake these words with so much emphasis, "He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."†

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* John 16. 25. † Ibid. 15. 26.

CHAPTER V.

JOHN THE BAPTIST EXPOSED TO THE ENMITY OF THE JEWS THE SAME AS CHRIST.

"John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and ye say he hath a devil."

We are apt to think that John, the forerunner of our Lord, had a smoother road to travel than his master; if this were so it would weaken his testimony, and might even be brought as an argument against his divine commission. Enlisted in the same cause, animated by the same spirit, we need not be surprised that both fought the same foes, and that the one had to contend as strongly against the natural enmity of the human heart as the other. The resistance that John encountered, the obstacles he overcame, the unbelief and opposition he met with, are not brought out as clearly in his case as in that of Christ. It is true the common people flocked to his baptism, and in some instances those of the highest rank, as Herod Antipas, who came with his court, and was at one time greatly interested in John's ministry (though his convictions were like the morning cloud and early dew) : but these were exceptions. The Scribes and Pharisees cherished as deep a hatred to John as to Christ. This was shown, as we have already seen, by the deputation of priests and Levites from Jerusalem to interrogate John concerning his office and ministry, and their condemnation of his baptism. They held this in no esteem, and denied his right to institute it. That belonged to the Sanhedrin. And naught but the favor of the people kept them from laying violent hands upon him, and putting him to death. Hence it was Jesus said of them, they counted themselves unworthy of eternal life, while harlots and publicans repented at the preaching of John the Baptist.

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* John 5. 36. † Matt. 3. 11. ‡ Luke 7. 33.

We need not go far for the cause. John, no more than Christ, advocated for the present an earthly monarchy. He went counter to all the prejudices and prepossessions of the rulers of the land. He favored not their greed ; he countenanced not their earthly views ; he remanded them back to their Scriptures, told them to study that infallible word, and learn what testimony it bore to Christ. This did not suit them ; their views were carnal, and they wished an exposition more in accordance with what they desired. Not a word was heard from John on this point. All he urged was a reformation of life, and a preparation of heart for the advent of Christ. Thus renouncing vain and worldly views, and desiring chiefly the glory of God, they would be prepared to receive one who was meek and lowly in heart, and who laid the foundation of his everlasting kingdom in the goodness of his subjects, and their submission to the divine will.

Had John done other than this, he could not have fulfilled his divine mission. His work was not merely to announce to the Jews that their Messiah was at hand. But strangest theme of all, most divine, most mysterious, that Jesus their Messiah was verily the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. Thus was the axe laid at the root of the tree; a blow struck which went down to the foundations of all iniquity, and the way prepared for making "all things new," for the fulfillment of that great word, "There shall be no more curse;" the wiping tears from off all faces, swallowing up death in victory, and giving to Christ the throne, the dominion, and the excellency of greatness and power forevermore.

The blinded Jews did not perceive this. Hence they had a controversy both with Christ and his forerunner. John had a devil; he drew the people to him by magic; it was the frenzy of the hour, not the power of God, which produced the reformation that spread through the land. They could allege nothing against him but his baptism; that he was a just and holy man, we have the gospel narrative, as well as the testimony of Josephus to show; also that he was universally regarded as a prophet, like those of old. But all this availed not. He denounced their vices; showed them their sin as with the point of a diamond, and spared not. What wonder, then, that he shared the fate of those who went before him, of whom the world was not worthy, and that the reproaches that fell upon Jesus fell upon John also.

Strange as it seems, almost incredible, nothing produces such rage in the unregenerate, unrenewed soul, when brought in direct antagonism with its life-giving power, as the death of Christ. It is as if all the demons of darkness took possession of such. Thus was it with the devils in Christ's day. It was against him they vented their spite; it was to injure him, to bring reproach upon his cause, that while he lived and labored they took full possession of the souls and bodies of men; and had not his word been all-powerful, and they compelled to yield to his sway, they would have done great harm.

It must be remarked, that if the cross of Christ does not soften it hardens; and in the end produces an obduracy that is the wonder of men, of devils, and of angels. Thus it was that all which John did went for nothing. His abstemiousness—the absence of every selfish motive—his deadness to the world—his irreproachable life—his holy conversation—his zeal—his fidelity—the good he wrought—the universal esteem in which he was held—did but add to the rage of his enemies and made him more hateful in their eyes, and they could say nothing too bad of him. Precisely the same feeling did they cherish toward Christ. John's exceeding strictness in the observance of the ceremonial law, his enforcement of the same, with its diverse washings and fastings, upon his disciples, did not save him from their censorious strictures, while on the other hand the laxity of Christ as to certain points of the law on which the Scribes and Pharisees laid the greatest stress, covered him with obloquy, and made them class him with the most notorious sinners.* It was impossible to please them. They were "like unto children sitting in the market-place, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept."† The leprosy lay deep within; but what stimulated to action this dire enmity, was the "offence of the cross." Long before, as well as after the death of Christ, this was all operative. The fathers in Israel, in all ages, their lawgiver, their prophets, and their holy men, even Abel, —all had suffered from this cause. As Jesus is the Lamb of God slain from before the foundation of the world, there is a certain deadly virus underlying the death of Christ, and which the cross calls into life, which, if not removed by timely submission to its sweet control, results and has always resulted, in a strange antipathy to it, the greatest animosity toward its advocates, and delight in whatever will oppose its progress. Thus it fared with John as with Christ, so that while on the one hand "all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John," on the other, "the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him."‡

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* Luke 7. 33, 34. † Ibid. ver. 33. ‡ Ibid. vers. 29, 30.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CLOSING TESTIMONY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST TO THE MESSIAHSHIP OF CHRIST.

As the sun declines the day departs, but how sweet are its declining rays. How effulgent they shine. The rising of the sun is sweet, but sweeter is his setting. It is like the last soft glance of a departing friend, as the eye closes in death ; a look never to be forgotten. Memory will write it on the heart ; and it will live while life itself shall last. The incoming of John into our world was redolent as with the breath of spring. The mysterious curtain of time was withdrawn, and an angel visitant, flying swiftly, heralded his birth. Angels gazed, looking down upon the wondrous scene. All heaven rejoiced, and attuned its strain to a higher note. The long night, full of sighs and tears, was fast passing away, and the bright and morning star began to emit its light, shining prelude to earth's glad day.

As through the golden portals of the sky, the angel Gabriel sped his joyful way, how beat his heart, thrilled with the message of the earth's approaching deliverance. Long had Gabriel and his confreres, a bright, shining host, spread out in innumerable array, waited for this day ; it had come at last. Through the gathering throng he passes; angel bands perhaps accompanying him on his way; and soon he sees the holy city. It is the hour of the evening sacrifice, and the fragrant incense as a thick cloud floats over the city full, and above the courts of the Lord's house, in sight of the multitude assembled in the court of the women for evening prayer. Stillness prevails; a solemn stillness. Little do the waiting multitude dream how the world's final destiny hangs upon the message about to be delivered by God's messenger to the aged priest whose lot it is on that day and hour to offer incense, sweet frankincense, to the Lord of heaven and earth. On the right side of the golden altar of incense stood the shining angel, ready to deliver his message, and to announce the birth of a son who was to herald to our world the appearance in it of the Lord of lords and King of kings. Long had prayer ascended from unfeigned lips for the fulfillment of a promise made, as in the case of Isaac, that to Zacharias and Elizabeth should be given a son who should precede Christ Jesus the Lord; a prophet indeed spoken of by Malachi, whom, under the designation of Elijah,* God would send "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: to turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers,"* so as in the end of the days, it should come to pass, according to prophecy, "there shall be no more curse."†

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* There cannot be the slightest doubt but that the Elijah foretold by Malachi was John the Baptist. "This is he," said Jesus, "of whom it is written, Behold I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee." Mal. 3. 2. Farther: Jesus speaking of John said to the Jews, "and if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come." Matt. 11, 14.

The aged priest, taught of God, understood the inspired word, and waited long, seemingly in vain, (as was the case with Abraham in respect to Isaac) the wished-for day; but no son appearing in the lapse of many long, revolving years, hope declined, and faith grew weak; so that when at last the angel of the Lord announced the long-expected birth, Zacharias, looking at himself instead of the power of God, was hardly satisfied with the verbal assurance of even an angel from heaven, but wished for some visible sign in confirmation of these wonderful tidings. Hence there fell upon him dumbness for a season; of a sudden bereft of speech, a partial infliction on account of his unbelief; the joy he felt far overbalanced the temporary deprivation, and he appeared before the people with a face of gladness, a supernatural radiance imparted to his features, as of one coming out of the presence chamber of the Most High.

A thrill all divine went through the assembly at the sight of the holy man, the aged priest of the sanctuary, unable to speak, making expressive signs or gestures with his uplifted hands, intimating to the assembled people that God had appeared to him in the temple, and had given him a sign for good. As the whole land was then in expectation of the coming Messiah, all hearts awoke, and all minds stirred to the very depths, there can be no reasonable doubt but that they connected with this heavenly vision an assurance of the speedy coming of Jesus the Lord. Joy filled all hearts, even the dumbness of Zachariah was held an augury for good ; and the multitude left the temple, Anna the prophetess among the number, and Simeon, whom God assured that he should not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ, rejoicing in the near prospect of the accomplishment of their wishes and hopes, as a nation and as individuals.

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*Mal. 4. 5, 6. † Zach. 14. 11. Rev. 22. 3.

Never was heir to an empire ushered thus into the world ; and all the accompanying circumstances, the birth, the circumcision, the spirit of prophecy that descended on Zacharias, the manner in which men's minds were moved as the various particulars of the child's birth were spread abroad, concurred to give importance to it ; and in the state of excited feeling so prevalent at that time, to lead men conversing together, inquiringly to ask "What manner of child shall this be ?"* It was an event treasured in their memories, carefully cherished, "laid up, pondered deeply in their hearts."†

But this child of yesterday, beyond any that ever were born into the world (save one, the High and Holy One that inhabiteth eternity) wore the mark of ages upon his name, his office, upon whatever appertained to his heavenly calling. Beside Malachi, centuries before Isaiah, had pointed as with his finger to this greatest prophet on the roll of time as the most highly favored messenger of heaven ; as the one whose august office it would be to introduce to our world the Lord of life and glory. Is it possible to conceive of a higher calling—of an office to vie with this—or of a person born into the world of such exalted rank? What has earth's heraldry on its escutcheon to compare with this—what is it that Isaiah doth say—what voice is it that comes down to us, like ocean's roar beating on the rock-bound shore of time, over the wide expanse of so many revolving centuries? It is this: "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of Jehovah, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."* Three centuries passing swiftly by as the rushing waters from the mountain flood, the prophet Malachi, last in the order of time, reiterates the wondrous announcement respecting John the Baptist: "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts."† To crown the whole, the Jewish canon, compiled and for the most part arranged in the form in which it now stands (to which effect we have the testimony of Josephus), closes with the express declaration that God will send Elijah the prophet (that is John the Baptist‡) before "the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:"§ so designated, and justly described, when of the holy child Jesus we are told by the evangelist John, "He was in the world, and the world was made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made."*

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* Luke 1. 66. † Ibid. 19. 51

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* Isa. 40. 3.

† Mal. 3. 1.

‡ See positive statement to this effect of our Lord, Matt. 11. 14. and 17. 11.

§ Mal. 4. 5.

Here then is a chain of a thousand links furbished and kept bright as gold through so many centuries, connecting John the Baptist with Christ, and placing his person and office before the Jewish nation and the world as second and inferior to none save that of Him "which should come after him, that is, Christ Jesus."† Thus inseparably joined, long before the curtain of time rose on "the mystery of the Gospel," were these two, John and Christ; and now in accordance with all that went before, with the word of prophecy, with the strange and solemn events preceding and accompanying the birth of John, as well with the history of his life and ministry, we come to his closing testimony concerning Jesus as the Messiah; the last words he uttered of which we have any record. Most explicit is this testimony, and enough to fill the mind with the solemnest and most reverential thoughts concerning Christ, the underived dignity of his person, the greatness of his office, and the wonderfulness of his mission to our world.

At the time this testimony was given, Jesus was first present in his public capacity at Jerusalem, during and after the feast of the Passover, remaining in and around the city until, and perhaps longer than, the Feast of Weeks, which followed the other after a lapse of fifty days. We have spoken of this before, and how the people leaving John followed Christ. This led to some expression of concern on the part of John's disciples; they were grieved at what was taking place, having either heard or seen the vast effect of the miracles and ministry of Christ upon the changing multitudes in and around the holy city.

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* John 1. 10, 3.

† Acts 19. 4.

Among other things, great numbers were baptized in the Jordan by the disciples of Jesus; a most unheard of circumstance, and which showed most clearly that Jesus claimed the right of baptism, that John no longer possessed the exclusive privilege of administering this divine ordinance. Inasmuch as John baptized Jesus, even as he did others, it hardly seemed compatible with that act, wherein Jesus had seemed to submit to John, that he should now enter the lists with him, and even arrogate to himself a certain superiority. Ignorant, really, of Christ, still in the dark, and ignoring his claims, they enter a protest in the form of inquiry against Christ and his disciples.

John takes this occasion to reaffirm all he had previously said of Christ Jesus our Lord; and to show to his disciples once more, and for the last time, the precise relation which he sustained to Jesus. He reminds them of the positive answer he gave to the priests and Levites from Jerusalem, whom he assured in the strongest manner, speaking most decidedly and unequivocally, that he "was not the Christ, but that he was sent before him;"*

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* John 3. 28.

and he calls upon his disciples to bear him witness that he had testified of Christ.

"Ye yourselves know this," he said. They had heard what he said, but at the time his words were more or less unheeded, and did not produce the needful conviction. Hence it is he recalled what he had then said, and reminds them of it. All through his ministry, from first to last, he had said the same thing, affirming and reaffirming it; placing between Christ and himself an infinite distance, as between a finite and an infinite being; as between a creature of yesterday and one who existed before all worlds, even from everlasting. He tries to show the infinite disproportion—his own exceeding littleness and nothingness when brought in strong contrast with his Lord—by saying of him, "the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose."* Language would admit of no stronger comparison. In this connection (at the first glance it might seem incongruous, and contradictory with what he had before said), in view of his human nature, drawing the line of distinction between the Godhead of Christ and his assumption of our flesh and blood, John recognizing this common tie that binds Jesus to our race, says: "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled."†

When John thinks within himself, as he beholds Jesus coming to his baptism, "all things were made by him,"[*] he is filled with holy awe, lost in wonder, and almost appalled; but when he views him as a man, as the bridegroom, his courage rises, his fears depart, and he calls himself the friend of the bridegroom. This change of terms, arising from a change of relationship, bespeaks the unparalleled love of Jesus to our lost and fallen world, and gives birth in John's o'erswelling heart to a joy inexpressible, because he sees in this love the restoration of all things; the fulfillment of God's word to Abraham, that in his seed, through the birth of Isaac, all the families of the earth shall be blessed: that this Canticle, spoken under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, will be sung, the strain reaching eventually, in the unfolding of the grand scheme of divine providence, all human hearts: "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey: I have drunk my wine with my milk; eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved."[†]

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* Luke 3. 16. † John 3. 29.

The disciples of John were troubled by the falling away, the sudden and rapid ebb of the popularity of their master. But yesterday John was all in all; Jerusalem, with every part of the land, from Idumea on the south to Galilee on the north, sent out its living streams to water and refresh the valley of the Jordan; the multitude of the people, like Israel of old, as they stood encamped, ready to enter the promised land, were "as the trees of lign aloes,"[‡] wafting fragrance all around, and giving life and beauty to the ever-changing scene. But now all is still and lonely to what it was a little while since; and the disciples of John say in a tone of sadness and complaint, "Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou bearest witness, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him."* To this John replies, "He must increase, but I must decrease."† John had foreseen this; he knew it from the beginning; it was part of his testimony. It arose from the nature of the relation subsisting between himself and Christ. To show this if possible still mere clearly than he had yet done, he says, still further drawing the striking contrast between himself and Jesus "Lord of all," "He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all."‡ Here John asserts in the most unequivocal manner, the heavenly origin of Jesus; he is not of the earth earthly as John was; nor, in a certain sense, does he speak of the earth, as one of mere human origin would, his vision bounded by earth and time; but while born of the virgin Mary, and once a babe in Bethlehem, he nevertheless "came down from heaven,"§ and is therefore "the Lord from heaven."‖ At another time John, speaking to the same point, said, "He that cometh after me is preferred before me: FOR HE WAS BEFORE ME."¶

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[*] John 1. 3. [†] Canticles 5. 1. [‡] Num. 24. 6.

He never varied from this testimony; the existence of Christ before his manifestation in the flesh is what he always maintained; hence he said, "and what he hath seen and heard that he testifieth."* In speaking of heaven, of things not seen as yet by mortal eye—what he reports thereof is not from hearsay, or vain speculation, but from actual observation. He has lived there—he has crossed the bridge that suspended in mid air separates the unknown from the known—heaven from earth—the visible from the invisible; and consequently when he speaks of the world whence he came, he "speaks of what he knows, and testifies of that which he has actually seen."† It is impossible for testimony to be clearer, or more direct and explicit than that of John, the forerunner of Christ, on this vital point.

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* John 3. 26. † Ibid. ver. 30. ‡ Ibid. ver. 31.

§ John 6. 38. ‖ 1 Cor. 15. 47. ¶ John 1. 15.

To sum up all; to show that John the Baptist stood in the mid-blaze of gospel day, that he understood what the disciples could not comprehend, ("for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified")‡ the nature of the death of Christ (this by special revelation antecedent to the day of Pentecost), John closes his testimony concerning Jesus the Messiah thus: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."§

In the course of his closing, and, as it proved to be, his dying testimony, the reader will remember that John in speaking of Jesus said, "He that cometh from above is above all." To the same effect spake Zacharias on the day of the circumcision of his son: "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord (that is Jehovah) to prepare his ways."*

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* John 3. 32. † Ibid. 3. 11. § Ibid. 7. 39. ‡ Ibid. 3. 36.

Jehovah in our world; this is what constituted the sum and substance of the testimony of John the Baptist; neither more nor less than this; Jehovah of Hosts the Jewish Messiah, the angel of the covenant in the wilderness, the same that appeared to Abraham at noonday under the oak Mamre, the captain of the host of the Lord that stood before Joshua with his sword drawn in his hand, when he "was by Jericho."† Thus was he portrayed by Isaiah at the same time that he foretold the birth of John, and described his exalted mission, giving him as high if not a higher place on the prophetic roll than even Moses, concerning whom it is written "the Lord knew face to face."‡ Here in close connection with John and his mission we have a picture of Christ both in his divine and human form, and while on the one hand he is represented as a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering the lambs with his arm, carrying them in his bosom, gently leading those that are with young, on the other hand he is presented to us as the Lord God who measures the waters in the hollow of his hand, who metes out heaven with the span, and comprehends the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighs the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance.§ It is in this two-fold light Jesus is presented by John to his ancient people the Jews as their Messiah; and this is the burden of all he said and did during his ministry and brief stay on earth—the sum of his testimony as a witness sent from God to prepare the way for the Jew's Messiah—addressing himself to Israel, and pointing them to Jesus; "O Zion, that bringest good tidings. get thee up into the high mountains, O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!"*

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* Luke 1. 76. † Josh. 5. 13, 14. ‡ Deut. 34. 10.

§ Isa. 40. 11, 12

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* Isa. 40. 9.

BOOK SIXTH.

CHAPTER I.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE WORKS OF CHRIST.

> "But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me."*

THE scene is in Galilee, but mostly in the cities on the shore of the lake; on the lake, or sea, also, and the country bordering upon, or in the vicinity of this beautiful sea. Jesus attended many of the feasts at Jerusalem from time to time; in spring, autumn and winter; but not remaining long at a time, he returned to the chief field of his labors, "the land of Zabulun, and the land of Naphtalim,"† as mapped out by the word of prophecy so many hundred years before. One advantage of this locality, in view of the genius of Christianity, its wide, expansive, all-embracing spirit, was its vicinity to nations outside of Judaism. Jesus was to be not only "for a covenant of the people, but for a light of the Gentiles."‡ The fame of Jesus, the loud report of his wonderful works soon extended to these lands, and both Phenicia and Syria sent forth their thousands to be witnesses of these things.

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* John 5. 36. † Isa. 9. 1. ‡ Isa. 42. 6.

We conceive this to be an important point. Not only Jews, but Gentiles also, were witnesses of the works which Jesus did, and sharers in them. They felt his all-healing power, they partook of his bounty, they were the subjects of his mercy. As their physician he did not distinguish between them and his own people. They were men suffering from the ten thousand ills which flesh is heir to, and this was a sufficient appeal to his all-compassionate bosom. This accords with the word of ancient prophecy, and bears testimony to the Messiahship of Jesus. Thus wrote Isaiah, speaking of the Messiah, "It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the end of the earth."*

It is a peculiarity of the works of Jesus, arising out of the great number that were performed, that only an infinitesimal fraction of them were ever recorded. They were numerous as the drops of the morning, almost countless as the sand upon the seashore. This should form a component part of their testimony, add greatly to their weight, and to the evidence deduced from this source. They were not a comparatively few isolated cases, as they stand recorded in the New Testament, but were so many in number that a selection was necessarily made; and these were written out under the aid and guidance of the Holy Spirit. To this intent speaks John the evangelist toward the close of his gospel narrative: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."*

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* Isaiah 49.-6.

Where did he go, what moment or hour passed, whether he was present or absent, whether he put forth his finger to heal or not, whether he spake or was silent, that signs and wonders were not continually done in his name? As showers fall upon the earth, watering it, causing the herb to spring forth, and turning the parched ground into a pool, so spontaneously did the works of Jesus abound—causing the lame man to leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb to sing—sending joy and gladness into many a household, and a new life from above into innumerable despairing hearts. But it was done as if it was not done; silently, unobtrusively; as the grass springs up under our feet, coving the wide field with a carpet of richest green, so abundantly yet quietly were made manifest the works of Jesus. Walking slowly along, his shadow healed. How many were thus healed, of the innumerable multitude that crowded around and pressed upon him, who can tell? They have not been written down; no count has been taken of them.

In one case we are told that a woman who but touched the hem of his garment was instantaneously healed of a long-standing malady which all the skill of physicians had failed to reach. Was this a solitary instance? Far, far from this. The fame of this cure went abroad, sending hope into many a heart, and thousands who thus touched Jesus, imitating the faith and example of the woman, "were made perfectly whole."* This was done on more than one occasion. Does this look like charlatanism? Nay, does it not bear the very impress of the Godhead? Nothing does Jesus do, not a word does he speak; not a movement of the body does he make; there is not even a glance of his eye directed to any object; yet we read that as "the whole multitude sought to touch him, there went virtue out of him, and healed them all."† Count the rain drops if you please, and see if you can reckon up the vast multitude that were thus cured. And they who were thus instantaneously healed were afflicted with every variety of disease. Jehovah among men, moving about in their midst, can we wonder that disease fled away, as if affrighted, from the presence of him who will sooner or later so restore the earth that none of the inhabitants thereof shall any more say, "'I am sick?"

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*John 20. 30, 31.

We may from the above begin to conceive of the countless thousands brought from every part of Judea, and from beyond its narrow limits, that felt the life-imparting, health-bestowing power of Jesus. The comparatively few instances recorded by the evangelists are isolated cases, selected from innumerable others, very striking indeed, but it is the endless number and infinite variety of the signs and wonders wrought by Christ which chiefly challenges attention, and attests the Godhead on our earth. If you strike out all that is written you take away the merest fraction of the whole, leaving a most formidable array still to be accounted for. Hence it is that John says, hardly in a tone of exaggeration, when we consider the numberless unrecorded works of almighty power performed by Jesus during the brief period of his public ministry: "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written."*

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* Matt. 14. 36. † Luke 6. 19.

CHAPTER II.

THE EVENING OF THE FIRST SABBATH DAY THAT JESUS SPENT IN CAPERNAUM.

On the morning of this day, in the synagogue, the reader will recollect Jesus cast out "a spirit of an unclean devil" from a man who was present on this occasion. After the services of the synagogue were over and the congregation dispersed, the man out of whom the devil had been cast forming one of the number, Jesus entering the house of Simon Peter, his home for the present, at the request of

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* John 1. 25.

Simon and his wife, and perhaps of others who had entered the house with him, cured Simon's wife's mother, who was seriously if not dangerously ill "with a great fever."* In all probability Jesus had slept under Simon's roof the previous night; and though Simon had a little before seen the miracle of the water turned into wine, yet it does not seem to have occurred to him to ask the interposition of Jesus in behalf of the sufferer until now. What had taken place that morning in the synagogue had given a wonderful impetus to the faith of all; and now they saw that nothing was too hard for Jesus to do. If he could cast out devils what could he not do?

With almost incredible swiftness, though it was the Jewish Sabbath, the tidings spread from village to village—to Bethsaida, to Chorazin—through all "the land of Gennesareth." We can form but a feeble conception of the commotion produced in people's minds. It was the first public display of miraculous power. [The reader will bear in mind we speak now of what occurred before Jesus went up to Jerusalem.] During John's ministry he did no miracle; but here is Jesus "to whom John bare witness," and at once, as soon as he enters upon his public ministry, he shows his great power by commanding the unclean spirits, and "they came out of him." Isaiah had foretold this of their Messiah; and the Jews knew it well. They looked for, in Christ, just such an exhibition of divine power. Had they not read, and did they not construe the life-giving passage in a literal sense,—"Himself," that is the

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* Luke 4. 38.

Anointed one—in other words, Christ, "took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."[*] In this sweet and hallowed connection doubtless they read over and over again, that afternoon, as they waited and watched for the going down of the sun with the most eager anxiety, other heart-cheering words in the same prophecy; as for instance these words:—thinking the while of what had taken place that very morning—"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace: that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth."[†]

Had they then seen the Lord's Anointed? Had they witnessed a display of Almighty power? Was the Lord among his people as in days of old? nay, even more gloriously manifested than ever before? We can judge of the result—of the faith they had in God's word—of their actual belief in Christ, from what transpired afterward, as the shades of evening settled over the earth—yea, before. As soon as the sun set, their Sabbath then over, from the houses in Capernaum—from the adjacent villages—as far as the word had swiftly run, "the good tidings of good" been published, the people in crowds, "all the city" of Capernaum, and from the other villages around, "gathered together at the door"[‡] of Simon Peter's house.

They were not simply impelled by curiosity. They had heard, it is true, of the sweet words that fell from his lips; they had been fascinated as by a magic spell: but they came in faith—not so much to hear or to see, as to receive new tokens of his omnipotent power. All through the closing hours of the Sabbath day their minds must have been exercised with Christ, chiefly with the morning's exhibition, and this so excited their hopes, the feeling was so universal, that from every house where there were sick persons, or persons possessed with devils, whatever indeed might have been the nature of the disease, whether of long or short standing, whether simple or complicated, whether more or less serious and alarming, their friends were seen bringing them to Jesus.

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[*] Isa. 53, 4. [†] Ibid. 52. 7. [‡] Mark 1. 33.

How strong must have been their faith in him—how unlimited their confidence. They asked no questions; they do not appear to have entertained the slightest doubt as to either the ability or willingness to heal them. And those who were brought on beds under the starry light of the skies, seem to have been inspired with the like confidence. What they had heard, not what they had themselves seen, banished all their fears, dispelled distrust, and led them, however sick and feeble, or whatever their bodily distress in the act of removal, to commit themselves unreservedly into the hands of their friends. What various thoughts must have occupied their minds as they were carried along, some borne on beds, some on litters; others leaning on the arm of a friend, on bending over a staff. How lively must have been their hopes, how strong their expectations, as they approached the spot where Jesus was, standing out in the night air, under the open sky, his "head filled with dew, his locks wet with the drops of the night.*" What love, what compassion moved his breast, as he saw the pallid faces of the sick, or witnessed the tottering steps of the weak, or marked the extreme anxiety of friends and kindred. The night passed on; far in the night the hours went by, but oh, how sorrow was turned into joy; how strength succeeded to languor, ease to pain, health to sickness, as Jesus "one by one laid his hands on them, and healed them."†

Tell me, if you can, the number that were healed that night. Count their number, and write it in a book. Remember, this was but the beginning of the ministry of Christ on our earth; his first night's work. May we not say, in view of the results of a single night, in one respect in a higher sense than of Israel of old, as we reckon the multitude that were healed (not numerically indeed, as yet), "who can count the dust of Jacob, or the number of the fourth part of Israel?"‡

Ere the strange scene closed, and the multitude dispersed, returning to their several homes, "all that were sick were healed."§ Not one was left of all those "that were sick of divers diseases"‖ but were completely cured of their various maladies: while of those "that were possessed with devils" "they were cast out with his word."¶ May we not readily suppose, in view of the events of this memorable night, of facts so striking, of such transparent proof of the Messiahship of Jesus, that the mind of the people would recur to the word of prophecy that foretold this of Christ Jesus the Lord: "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."* It would seem from this that he who "his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree,"† also "bare our griefs and carried our sorrows." In how near and intimate a relation does this place Christ to us, and how does it show his love: He took on himself our bodily ills, our griefs, our numerous and ever-recurring infirmities.

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* Sol. Song 5. 2. † Luke 4, 41. ‡ Num. 23. 10.

§ Matt. 8. 16 ‖ Mark 1. 3. 34.

¶ Compare Matt. 8. 16. with Mark 1. 34.

Even in view of the events of this single night, may we not justly say of Capernaum, that it was perhaps before any other city "exalted to heaven" by the presence of Christ. But what was done now was but the beginning of those "mighty works" which Jesus ceased not to display in Capernaum, even to the very close of his earthly career. Nowhere else perhaps, not even in Jerusalem, the holy city, did our Lord, to such a degree, display his glory as here. This shore how dear; this spot how sacred.

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* Isa. 53. 4. † 1 Pet. 2. 24.

CHAPTER III.

CHORAZIN—BETHSAIDA—CAPERNAUM.

"Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell." Matt. 11. 21, 23.

Of the three cities which form the title-head of this chapter "wherein most of the mighty works of Jesus were done,"* lying as they did adjacent to each other (as we have already said) and along the shore of the sea of Galilee, we have but few traces of the footsteps of Jesus, save in Capernaum. This serves to show what we have advanced in the preceding chapter—how few of the countless number of the works of Jesus have been recorded. In Chorazin, especially, we do not now recall one. Yet was it one of the favored three where "most of his mighty works were done." Here were seen innumerable instances of the wonder-working power of Christ; but unrecorded, like the waves of the sea beating for years unknown upon the rock-bound shore, they leave behind them no trace; they tell no tale of the mighty working of a mysterious agency in the past. But their fate tells the tale, and whispers like the low, sad moan of the ocean, of the works of Jesus once done in their midst.

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* Matt. 11. 20.

When, not many years afterward, Vespasian with his son Titus, at the command of the emperor Nero, invaded Judea, and overran Galilee, these three cities, with Tarichеæ on one side of the lake and Gamala on the other, shared a common fate. Tiberias, it is true, escaped, as a city belonging to Agrippa; but amid the general havoc, the overthrow of two such strongly fortified cities as Tarichеæ and Gamala, the battle on the lake, the thousands slain, the cruelty of the Roman soldiers, and the savage counsels that prevailed among the officers of the army of Vespasian (not however including Titus), the words of Jesus, we may well conclude, received a most solemn verification; these cities were swept away as with the besom of destruction. But now all was fair and smiling; and Jesus went from one to another, from time to time, showing himself among them, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord. The sun rose from day to day upon works which none but God could do, but, strange to say, with comparatively small effect. One reason, among others, for this, was that as the fame of Jesus extended, and his great works became more and more known, while he remained for the most part stationary in the vicinity of the lake, Jews came from Jerusalem to these parts to use their influence against him, and to stay the tide as much as they could.

The venom worked; their hate and malice had its effect, backed as it was by the high official position of these traducers of Jesus. In every way they sought to circumvent him. Their slanders were terrible, their accusations infamous; there was nothing too bad for them to say. They vilified not only his name but his wondrous works, ascribing them to the devil, to magical incantations. They impeached his life, that life so pure and sinless, a life without a flaw. What blindness possessed them—what hardness of heart urged them on! Many drank in their words; and while it was impossible, truly, to "find any fault" in him, as Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, afterward confessed, yet they embittered many minds, and even in the cities where "most of his mighty works were done" he had comparatively few adherents. They joined the crowd; they looked on in wonder; but perhaps of those who were the recipients of his bounty, but one in ten, as in the case of the ten lepers, if indeed as many as this, was really grateful. This would hardly seem possible, but it is very like human nature; the lesson that experience too often teaches.

Amid the ever swelling crowd that flocked to Christ, we seem to see him sailing on a smooth sea, or swimming securely on a topmost wave; but there is an under current, a ground swell, unseen but dangerous; ever threatening instant destruction. He could scarcely ever open his lips but there were those who watched his speech, anxious to find some word inadvertently spoken, that would form ground of accusation before the Roman civil tribunal. As their Messiah, or claiming to be such, they imagined he would advance claims that would compromise him with the Roman government. Failing in this, with premeditated craft, and as they conceived with superior cunning, they propounded questions with the express purpose of getting him in some way committed against the powers that be—having witnesses at hand to support their allegations. But they were invariably baffled by a wisdom infinitely beyond their own short-sighted craftiness: and they always retired discomfited from these malicious attempts.

In Galilee, then, and even in these favored cities on the shore, the ministry of our Lord must be regarded for the most part as a failure. There were after all but few comparatively who believed in his name. Had it been otherwise perhaps the doom denounced upon Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum would have been averted ; and while the rest of the land was laid waste by the Roman soldiery, these smiling and pleasantly situated cities might have been preserved from the general ruin. Of Galilee, then, as well as of Judea proper, after all that Jesus did, it might be said, referring to their rejection of Christ, as Isaiah had before prophesied would be the case, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"*

But while what we have said was true of the majority of the Galileans, it was not true of all. Among the first of those who believed, was the Jewish ruler, whose son, at the point of death, Jesus healed. He was of Capernaum, and like Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea, his mind, we conclude, had been previously deeply impressed by the words and acts of Jesus, before he left this part of the country to attend the feast at Jerusalem. Hence his journey to Cana of Galilee to seek the aid of our

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* Isa. 53. 1.

Lord for his sick son ; and so strong was his faith in Christ that in the absence of any outward sign given at the time to attest the cure, he firmly believed the word of Jesus ; and according to his faith so it was. He needed not to be with his son, to witness in his sick chamber the sudden transformation, the change from sickness to health, but far distant he was as satisfied of the salutary change as if he had seen it with his own eyes. From that hour himself and all his house believed Jesus to be the Messiah. Here Jesus henceforth had a home and true friends, who doubtless stood firm against the machinations of the scribes that came from Jerusalem to catch him in his talk, and to invent and basely circulate all sorts of malicious and slanderous reports against the Son of Man.

Amid these slanders it is that the faith of individuals in Jesus is so marked, and reaches a height not often or easily attained. We are apt to think that under the circumstances it was easy to attain a faith that "laughed at impossibilities," and remained unshaken ever afterward ; but not so. Glad as all were of present relief, and ready to hail Jesus as their temporal deliverer, how soon did they go back upon their own words ; how soon, even after they were healed, did their faith waver, and they forgot the hand that fed them, and placed their feet upon a rock. Unbelief was as present now as with their fathers in the wilderness, in the days of their wanderings ; with them the miracle of the manna in the tented field by day, and the fiery pillar by night, and the water from the flinty rock, and the quails from heaven, and the voice of God from Sinai, with the shaking of the mount, and flaming fire issuing from its summit, and loud thunderings, was not sufficient for the confirmation of their faith. So also with the children of the fathers in the time of Christ; their present need supplied, the past was soon forgotten, and they quickly slid away from God.

It is in view of this backsliding and wavering tendency, that the faith of those who believed in Christ, and who remained firm in their adherence to him, as we are ready to think, ever afterward possesses so peculiar a charm, and partakes of the sublime in its effect on our minds. It is faith under difficulties, under obloquy, under suffering; faith in one holy, just, and good, against whom wicked men and devils were continually hurling their hellish darts. This sheds a radiance, pure and serene, around the Roman centurion, the woman with the issue of blood, and Jairus, the Jewish ruler, whose little daughter Jesus raised from the dead. How high is the encomium which Jesus passed upon the faith of the centurion. That faith, how strongly marked it was in all its leading characteristics, and the manner in which Jesus speaks of it shows the immense importance which is attached to it. So lovely is the spectacle of the woman, whose faith in Christ rising superior to all obstacles, went directly to his heart, and procured at once the blessing she so anxiously and assuredly sought. Such cases as these, we may be sure, rested on a foundation not easily moved, and constituted them true disciples, and ever-attached disciples, of the Lord Jesus. Here was a prevailing faith in Christ quite unlike that of the fickle multitude; and this was as much exemplified in the time of Christ as in the days of Moses and all the prophets. When, after the resurrection, the whole came to be summed up, how few in number was the assembly of saints as the fruit of the ministry and works of Jesus; some five hundred in all. The leaves and the blossoms gave a goodly show, but the ripened fruit could be put in a small compass. The men of that generation did but repeat the story of their fathers; and the same unbelief was exhibited in the time of Christ as in all their former history; while the veil remains even until our day.

CHAPTER IV.

QUARE DUBITASTI?

"Wherefore didst thou doubt?"—Matt. 14. 32.

Capernaum was the chief place of resort. Thither came the people from all parts of the land, because this was the home of Jesus. From his various excursions through Galilee, and to the borders of Tyre and Sidon, he would return to this city, as also after he had attended the feast in Jerusalem. As a dove to its covert, as a swallow to her nest, so would he hasten back to this favored spot—this home by the sea, followed, however, by the swarming multitude. It was as if they could not bear him out of their sight for a single moment. He resided probably under the same roof with his mother, his sisters, and his brothers.

Amid the glory that surrounded him from the fame of his marvelous works, and amid the vast crowds of every rank and name that ever waited on his footsteps, that gathered around the house where he dwelt, he lived as plainly, as simply as he had done in Nazareth, before he was driven from that city. As to his uprising and lying down, going in and out of the house, sitting down at the same table with his brethren, his mother's fond eye ever fastened upon him, he lived over again his earlier life. But he had little leisure now; not a moment that he could call his own; hardly time to eat, or drink, or sleep. At times when pressed by the crowd he would walk toward the sea-shore, and getting in a small boat, push out a little way from the shore, and discourse in parables, setting truth in an agreeable form, "like apples of gold on silver salvers," to the innumerable company that lined the shore. Gently the limpid wave gave motion to the boat, not enough however to interrupt or break the thread of his discourse as the golden words dropped from those anointed lips. Some fair morning, say in June, when nature is in her earliest bloom, and the carol of birds is heard from the tree, and the sun is sweetly shining, and all is still and peaceful, as if the sound of discord had forever passed away, and the age of Saturn returned to our earth, we may conceive of Jesus as thus speaking, his words as soft music borne melodiously over the yielding wave.

But now and then, freeing himself from the crowd, and desirous of solitude, of momentary relief from never-ceasing labor, he would, with his disciples, cross the lake, landing in the vicinity of Cesarea Philippi, so named by Herod Philip, in honor of the reigning emperor, the third Cæsar.

Not very far from this city, within the domain of Herod Philip, was a desert place, a large piece of pasture land ("much grass") somewhat remote from towns and villages, but accessible, where he was wont to find for a little season the seclusion which he sought, and the opportunity to be alone with his disciples. But this did not last long; following him in boats, or walking around by the head of the lake, crossing by a bridge the Upper Jordan, before it enters by a narrow inlet the Sea of Galilee, the people in crowds soon got track of his footsteps and came where he was, little heeding the distance or fatigue, and making scant provision in the way of necessary food.

Now was renewed the scene on the banks of the Jordan, when the people flocked in crowds as doves to their windows, to the ministry and baptism of John. Here was the same eager throng hanging from day to day on the lips of Jesus, eating sparingly of food, hardly enough to satisfy the demands of nature, ready to forego ease, food, and all their usual comforts in their quiet habitations, for the privilege of being near the person of Jesus, and listening to his life-giving words, as he spake of "the kingdom of God."

Two suns had gone down, two days had swiftly passed, and the third was hastening toward its close,* when Jesus bethought him of the vast multitude faint with hunger, weary and sore, yet unable to tear themselves away from one who showed such power in his acts, such sweetness in his words, such tenderness of soul. They had of course been more or less supplied with provisions from the neighboring towns and villages, but perhaps even this supply was not sufficient; at all events at this time there was scarcely anything in the way of food left at all adequate to satisfy the cravings of so many thousands then present, and among them women and children. As for the disciples it was customary for them to carry their provisions with them on journeys similar to the present;† but this time they also, as it appears, were without bread.

Where such large assemblages of people meet in the open air, and away from cities and towns, there are always those who, having an eye to the need of the hour and their own gain, are ready with their baskets filled with food, to supply the demand. But on this extraordinary occasion, owing perhaps to the length of time that had elapsed, the whole stock on hand was upon inquiry found to be "five barley loaves and two small fishes,"‡ and well might Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, say, "But what are they among so many?"§

It was Andrew who communicated the intelligence of the bread and fishes, and it was done in reply to a question Jesus put to Philip, as he looked upon the great company spread far and wide over the grassy plain, and who were as sheep not having a shepherd, "Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?"* Philip was wholly at a loss for an answer, notwithstanding all he had seen of the works of Jesus, and what he had read of the power of God in the past history of his people—how bread had been multiplied under the hand of the prophet Elisha.† He never dreamed of the superhuman ability of Jesus to supply out of his inexhaustible storehouse a superabundance for all these thousands, hungry and faint, and to satisfy every demand of the appetite.

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* There is a slight anachronism here in consequence of blending two accounts, not much varying in their general character, into one. See Matt. 15. 32, compared with Matt. 14, 13—21.

† Matt. 16. 5. ‡ Ibid. 14. 7. § John 6. 9.

There was neither doubt nor anxiety on his side, "for he himself knew what he would do."‡ "The eyes of all wait upon him; that he gives them they gather; they are filled with good." Compassion moved his bosom; love filled his heart. These stray sheep in the wilderness, were they not "the sheep of his pasture, the work of his hands?" What if they were partly blinded as to the nature of his mission—what if they should mistake the purpose of the miracle he was about to perform, and wish to make him king—what if they should close their eyes against this new proof of his omnipotency and wonder-working power—what if they should wholly misconceive the typical and spiritual character of the miracle, and fail to read the lesson it was intended to impart, and for which it prepared the way (to wit, that Jesus was the Bread of Life), this had no effect upon him; he did good on his own principle, hoping for nothing again; and knowing full well beforehand the nature of the return he would receive from the recipients of his bounty.

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* John 6. 5. † 2 Kings 4. 42, 44. ‡ John 6. 6.

As if he had the most ample provision spread on a table in the wilderness, Jesus proceeds to feed the hungry multitude, making no account of the seemingly scanty supply. As fast as his disciples could distribute the loaves and the fishes, without the least intermission or slightest delay, as the meal in the barrel, and the oil in the cruse of the poor widow, forever multiplied itself—so did the fish and the loaves of bread as they passed through the hands of Christ.

Thousands of persons were looking on, their eyes intently fastened on the Lord of the feast. The scene was under the open sky; the place of the banquet a wide unoccupied field, and the sun clearly shining, though assuming those golden rays which mark his pathway as he gradually approaches the verge of the horizon. There was no machinery of any description at hand to act as an intervening process; there was no claptrap observable; all was fair, open, and above-board: while they who partook of the bread and the fish could readily tell whether any deception, on this occasion, was practiced upon them, whether the distribution of bread was a cheat (the twelve disciples co-operating with Jesus in so astonishing a fraud), or whether in reality they were satisfied with bread, and their hunger appeased by the food they partook of from the disciples, as they went about among the different groups, divided into sections of a hundred, or fifty, all seated on "the green grass." Here is a something not easily mistaken; within the comprehension of an infant at the breast, and those fed could not fail to know it. They rose up from the feast fully satisfied, and that there might be no mistake as to the supernatural character of the miracle performed this day by Jesus, in the presence of so great a company, all of whom were participants in it, there was left of the fragments of the bread and fishes enough to fill twelve baskets. If one should ask by what power this was done, there can be but one reply: It was done by the power of God; by the same power that created man perfect at the first, giving him a perfect body, shaping it after a divine model, and then breathing into the faultless but inanimate clay the breath of life. It does not take (according to "science falsely so called") God Almighty endless ages to perfect his works; but precisely as he made the bread in the wilderness, without its passing through the usual process of sowing and reaping, of being ground at the mill, or baked in the oven, so has he created all worlds, and thus do all his works bear the direct impress of an Almighty hand.

Whatever others might think or say at the time who were not present, whether they accepted the attestation of so many thousand witnesses, there can be no doubt of its effect upon those who saw it; of their entire belief in its supernatural character. At once carried away by so marvelous a spectacle, filled with wonder and admiration, they crowded around Jesus, and would fain have compelled him on the spot to be their King. The clamor we may suppose to have been great; the urgency of their entreaties, in a human sense, almost overpowering. What a wonder-work was here! It was as if a word was spoken, and the sea broke forth from nameless depths. What could not Jesus do—he who thus as it were rained manna as of old from heaven, and caused water to gush forth from the flinty rock. How easy for Jesus, victor over the secrets of nature, to lead their armies forth to battle, and place their nation highest on the roll of fame. This seemed at the moment, under the enthusiasm of the passing hour, a very easy thing for him to do; and they were resolved at all events to have it so. But the hour had not yet arrived for Jesus to ascend "the throne of his father David,"* and for God to fulfill his unchangeable purpose to his ancient people; and Jesus therefore imperceptibly withdrew himself from them, and so escaped their honest but mistaken importunity.

Defeated for the present in their well-meant intention, and the day nearly if not quite gone, the greater part of the company remained on the ground for that night, waiting perhaps for the dawning of another day to renew the attempt. Meanwhile Jesus went up "into a mountain himself alone," having first sent his twelve disciples away in a ship to return during the night to Capernaum.

The wind arose during the night, lifted up the waves, and made them rough and boisterous. With all their toil the disciples had gone but three or four miles, and already the fourth watch of the night, the last hours of the long and tedious night, had come round. The wind blew louder and louder, grew stronger and stronger, and the waves, already swollen, rose higher and higher, as the hours of the night slowly passed away, the disciples toiling laboriously at the oar,* but making little or no headway, as the wind blew directly in their faces. Suddenly amid the darkness and the noise of dashing waves against the prow of the boat, there was seen, as if emerging from the mist of the night, a form—looking taller in the darkness—a shape as of a man walking on the waves; now rising, and anon descending with the action of the boisterous sea. Surely they cannot be mistaken. As the form draws nearer the vessel, and becomes more perfectly defined, they conceive it to be the figure of a spirit, not the appearance of a man of real flesh and blood. Terrified by the sight, and filled for the moment with superstitious dread, (why should they be alarmed supposing it to have been a spirit?) "they cry out for fear."

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* Luke 4. 38.

Not for an instant did they imagine it to be Jesus. Such an appearance as this on the part of their master had not presented itself to their minds. He had accompanied them to the boat, and insisted, in spite of all they could say, that they should sail without him, and reluctantly they assented. What then must have been their surprise, how great their awe, as they heard his voice, rising clear and distinct above the roar of the waves, and the noise of the winds, saying cheerily unto them, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid."* Great and marvelous as was the miracle of the bread the preceding afternoon, a display of world-making in miniature, the disciples were wholly unprepared for this new exhibition of his Godhead.

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* The sacred narrative describing this night scene and speaking specially of the stormy wind, says, "and the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew."—John 6. 18.

Instead of inventing such a scene as this for the entertainment of curiosity-mongers, they tell the story of their own weakness in the momentary absence of the master, and betray to others their almost childish fears. While they exalt Jesus, they do not hide their own blindness, and show how soon one of the greatest works of Christ was temporarily forgotten. Well may it be said of our Lord literally, as it was aforetime metaphorically, "He has his way in the sea;" making a highway of the great deep as of solid ground. And why not? Hath he not "founded the earth upon the seas, and established it upon the floods?"† Is not "the sea his? and did not his hands prepare the dry ground?" When we remember that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,"‡ and that according to the prayer of Solomon, at the dedication of the temple, anticipatory of this event, God verily did, in the end of the days, dwell among men, all our wonder at these mighty marvels will insensibly vanish. They are none the less wonderful in themselves, but they are precisely what we should expect of him who "sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in."* The Lord of Hosts is his name. Low views of God in Christ are the cause of all the difficulty, and the fruitful source, both in the church and out of it, secretly and openly, of all the infidelity in our world, and this both among Jews and Christians.

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* Matt. 14. 27. † Psa. 24. 2. ‡ John 1. 14.

Simon Peter soon after essaying to do the like, by the permission of Christ, ere the stormy sea had calmed, for awhile treads the water too, but the raging billows, rising high around, frighten him, and he begins to sink. The waters had nearly gone over his head, when Jesus, reaching forth his hand, sustained his sinking feet, saying to him as he did so, gently but reprovingly, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" "And when they (Jesus and Peter) were come into the ship the wind ceased."†

CHAPTER V.

A DISCOURSE IN THE SYNAGOGUE AT CAPERNAUM ON THE "BREAD FROM HEAVEN."

THE next morning those who had slept on the ground upon awaking found Jesus also gone; and as they had seen his disciples embarking without him, they concluded that he had recrossed the lake; though they knew not by what mode of conveyance.

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* Isa. 40. 22. † Matt. 14. 32.

Without delay, embarking in their own boats, as the disciples did in theirs, the multitude hastened back to Capernaum, more eager than ever to see Jesus. The miracle of the loaves and fishes had made a profound impression, and they said one to another: "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world."*

Once more in Capernaum, and assembled in the synagogue, after the signal display in the open air of the miracle of the loaves, our Lord uses it as a text, and discourses to the people of himself as "the true bread from heaven,"† and this in terms so clear and explicit that it is impossible for an unprejudiced mind to mistake their meaning. In close and inseparable connection with this declaration, as if to make it yet more precise and definite, he further adds, "and the bread that I will give is my flesh, (that is, 'body,'‡) which I will give for the life of the world."§ No casuistry can get around these words, or weaken their force. That the Jews who were present, and heard them as they fell from the lips of Jesus, understood them to mean what they expressed, is evident from the powerful revulsion of feeling which they almost instantaneously produced.

Yesterday, borne along by the intensity of their feelings, they would have proclaimed him King, and even forced him to accept the proffered honor; today they murmur at him because he says, "I am the bread which came down from heaven,"‖ and captiously they ask, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"*

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* John 6. 14.

† Ibid. 6. 32.

‡ Heb. 10. 5, 10.

§ John 6. 51.

‖ Ibid. 6. 41.

This was not the language of the King, the mighty conqueror that they expected; its deep, spiritual import of course they did not understand; but it was clear to them that one who spoke thus of himself would not make the Roman eagles fly before him. There was nothing here of the clarion trump of war, or of "garments rolled in blood." They were greatly dissatisfied; the miracle of the loaves and fishes faded away from their minds, and they questioned the propriety of his language; his right to use such words as these. They fell back upon the old ground of offense, his family and kindred; they stumbled upon this stumbling stone. Forgetting for the time all his mighty works, lost in vague conjecture, disappointed as to their worldly hopes, and vain expectations as a nation, they say of Christ, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?"† Had they but have known "The shepherd, the stone of Israel,"‡ and exercised patience, they would in the end have found Jesus to be a "Leader and Commander to the people,"§ though he would have led them to sure and certain victory by a way that they knew not, and after a manner very different from their own preconceived notions. But this resistance of his to temporal power and dominion baffled their designs in one direction; while his strange and unheard of assumptions, which could apply to none but God himself, filled them with horror, as blasphemous (which surely they would have been if Jesus were not really and truly God), and led them to turn away from him.

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* John 6. 52. † Ibid. ver. 43. ‡ Gen. 49. 24.

§ Isa 55. 4.

As after a high spring-tide the waters regain their customary channel, and as summer advances sink lower and lower, so the people, disappointed, first, that Jesus would not assume command, and act as their leader (did not prophecy say this of him?) against the Romans, and then offended, most deeply displeased, because of what they deemed the arrogance of his pretensions—he a man like themselves, and whose family they knew so well—left him in a body. Of the great number who, awhile since, were at least nominally his disciples, few, if any, were found to adhere to him at the close of his discourse in the synagogue. This in itself is proof that the words spoken by Jesus on this occasion, words so deep, so high, so lofty, were taken by the Jews in a literal sense, just as they were meant to be taken, and as such are corroborative of the Messiahship of Jesus.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FEAST OF THE TABERNACLES.

UNDER the appellation of "The bread of life," "the true bread from heaven," "the living bread which came down from heaven,"* Jesus the Christ, in the synagogue at Capernaum, had thus spoken of himself. He said what he did knowing full well the import of his own words; not in any wise weakening or modifying them to suit his hearers; to accommodate himself to their prejudices, knowing at the same time the painful result that would follow. "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."†

From any other man possessing a sound mind, did ever such language reach our ears? Neither does he stop here. He speaks of his flesh, that is, his body, as the bread from heaven "which he will give for the life of the world." And when the Jews offended drew back from him, and renounced his fellowship because he used language so horrifying to their sensitive ears, and so derogatory to God their Maker, instead of qualifying his language, he gives to it added emphasis: "Doth this offend you?" he asks. "What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before?"‡ "I came down from heaven, I shall return thither" this is the plain interpretation of these words, and they are positive in their character.

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* John 6. 32, 35, 51. † Ibid. ver. 66. ‡ Ibid. ver. 62.

As we read these words, so expressive, so reassuring, do they not seem, in a tone sublime, to remind us in part at least, of what Jesus said to Nathaniel, "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."* Do we not seem to see the portals of heaven open, to send forth, and receive back to its glorious domain the Son of Man? Could language be stronger, plainer, more explicit? He that runs may he not read? May we not gather by the river and see this second ascension as in a chariot of fire? The angels of God are they not there also? See we not the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof?† Never on earth, we undertake to say, was seen a spectacle so grand as this. A man with no insignia of the skies claiming alliance with heaven—speaking of it as his native country; and announcing, in unmistakable language, his intention of soon returning to this abode of light. And yet this is what Jesus did.

And now, in the autumn of the year, as the time of our Lord's departure from our world approaches, our world on which he had alighted as a messenger from the skies, for a little season, he prepares to go up to Jerusalem to the feast. This was a festival of joy and gladness, when the ripened fruits had all been gathered in. But a little before had been observed,with great solemnity, the day of Atonement, prefigurative of Christ's sacrificial death; this had passed, and the time of joy had now returned. Joyful was the gleaner's voice ; glad was the husbandman to rest from his toil ; and happy this hour of national reunion. Care for awhile is forgotten ; and the increase of the field, and the lowing of cattle, and the bleating of flocks, give token of peace and abundance ; while hand joins to hand, and all unite in a general embrace.

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* John 1. 51.

† 2 Kings 2. 12.

Must it not have been a sight striking to the foreigner, and greatly impressive in itself, to see the gathering of a whole nation in its capital, and in its holy temple, for the purpose of a general thanksgiving. The Greeks occasionally had festivals, occurring, however, but once in four years, somewhat similar to this of the Jews, but the religious element was not so strong, neither was the design precisely the same.

About the middle of the feast Jesus made his appearance. There had been much inquiry concerning him. Things were not as they had been. The various elements of opposition had gathered strength ; the clouds lowered, and the storm darkened over the way. One of the most disheartening signs of this "dark and cloudy day" was the unbelief of his own "brethren."* Much time had now elapsed since Jesus first "manifested forth his glory" in Cana of Galilee, and everywhere throughout the land the place of his feet had been made glorious. Again and again he had gone to and returned from Jerusalem, chiefly at the feasts, doing each time mighty works ; and his labors were now fast drawing to a close, but still his kinsmen after the flesh, they of his own household, stood aloof from him, and had not yet acknowledged his divine mission. This is certainly the plain statement of the text. They appear to have found fault with him because he spent so much time in Galilee, and neglected to assert his claims more decidedly in the chief emporium of the nation. It would appear to have been a sharp reproof on their side that he lacked courage. Who can say? Perhaps they thought he delayed too long to snatch the fruits of his mighty works, of his amazing popularity with the common people, and the influence of his great name spread abroad in every direction. They may have been intensely selfish, and not comprehending any more than most others his true work, have wished to share in the triumphs of victory, and like John and James have been desirous to attain posts of honor, and to be made dignitaries of the first rank, in the new kingdom.

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* John 7. 5.

At the time of the arrival of Jesus at Jerusalem, and his appearance at the feast, speculation was rife as to whether he would come or not; while at the same time there was great contrariety of opinion, even among the people generally, concerning Christ. This was a vital question (to a Jew none more so), and has continued to be so to this day. Then all were alive to it, for there was Jesus in their very midst, calm, self-possessed, speaking "boldly,"* no ways intimidated by his enemies (now more active than ever, and bent upon his destruction), foregoing none of his claims, but more strongly than ever asserting his Messiahship, and putting it to a present test, so far as their own inward consciousness went. It would seem as time went on people were more and more perplexed; some said one thing, some another; this coterie of disputants was for him—this against him. Some, unable to resist the evidence of his miracles, which accumulated every day, and like a mighty river received accessions continually from hill and valley as it swept along,—said of Jesus and his works, "When Christ cometh will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?"*

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* John 7. 26.

The Sanhedrin sat in council; and finding that do as they would they could not carry the people as a body against him—however they might prevail with some—they resolved to take him by force, and bring him before their tribunal. But the officers and men sent to execute their orders returned without Christ; and candidly confessed that subdued by the charm of his speech they could not find it in their hearts to lay hands upon him. They knew not that he was protected by an invisible agency, by legions of angels, until his hour should come, and the full term expire.

The council were greatly chagrined at this result; and though they did not punish them for non-performance of duty, they angrily and vehemently denounced them as carried away by the popular delusion. Addressing the officers they said, "Are ye also deceived?"† At this point in the proceedings,

* John 7. 31, † Ibid ver. 47.

Nicodemus cautiously interposed a word in defense of Christ, showing that their law did not condemn any man without a full and fair investigation ; and that it was wrong to pronounce judgment on a man before hearing what he had to say ; and to account him accursed unless he had actually violated their law.* This incensed the council still more, and abruptly they broke up the present meeting ; "every man going unto his own house."

Amid all these perturbations, these discussions, this secret, hostile plotting of the council, Jesus, the Lord, went on calmly with his work. In meekness he opposed himself to his adversaries, and met their charges with suitable replies—always with the advantage on his side. Despite all opposition and controversy, many, during the progress of the feast, believed in Jesus, convinced by his teaching, apart from his miracles, that he was indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

And now the last day, the great day of the feast, had arrived ; Jesus walked still among the people unharmed, untouched ; a wall of fire as yet was built around him ; and like the three Hebrew children in the midst of the fiery furnace, there was not even the smell of fire upon his garments. To-morrow the festival will close, and all leaving their temporary booths, made of the branches of trees, already withering under the fierce rays of the sun, will return to their dwellings—having thus commemorated their long sojourn in the wilderness, when they were wanderers without a city of habitation.

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* John 7. 51.

Those from a distance would speedily return to their several homes, and resume their regular avocations, cheered by the pleasing associations and fond remembrances of this joyous vintage festival.

The multitude of people was very large on this closing day, more so than on any other day, save that of the opening of the feast. Christ's presence gave additional interest to the ceremonies of the day, to whatever appertained to its due observance, and especially in connection with the rite of drawing water from the pool of Siloam, and pouring it upon the holy altar in the priests' court. This was done in the morning, and was a time of hilarity and joy, conjoined with the loud voice of praise;* the people at the same time waving branches of palm which they held in their hands. The hymn sung, Jesus occupying a prominent place, took this occasion to cry aloud, all being attent to hear what he would say, "If any man thirst" (these words were probably spoken in the court of the women, which was the usual place of assemblage for morning and evening prayer), "let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."†

This is the language not of man but of God; of him who said: "I am the Lord that maketh all things."‡ It came with convictton to the people; it carried along with it its own demonstration, even as the voice of Jehovah to Moses, from out of the burning bush. Did not the children of Israel know the voice of the Lord as it came forth from Sinai, sounding loud and clear as a trumpet, or with a mighty force, as the "noise of many waters?" So with the words of Jesus on this occasion, at the Feast of Tabernacles, in the audience of all the people. Such was its effect, so all-powerful and convincing, that "many of the people" heretofore doubting said: "Of a truth this is the Prophet." "Others said, This is the Christ."* They could not resist the force with which Jesus spoke; they believed what he said; while some doubted, these were convinced.

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* The 118th Psalm was sung on this joyful occasion.

† John 7. 37. ‡ Isa. 44. 4.

As the days were drawing near their close, and the curtain was about to fall upon Christ and the invisible which he disclosed, his utterances became clearer and more distinct; he meant that his people should not plead ignorance of his claims. He now speaks openly, in the presence of all the people, without reference to their prejudices, or the seeming incompatibility which existed between his words and his appearance, what he had previously said in private conference with the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well. Jesus, yes, "the man Christ Jesus," is himself the well of life within the soul, rising up spontaneously and unceasingly, making "the thirsty land springs of water;"† watering and overflowing the soul; keeping it ever alive to God, fresh and vigorous by an innate force, a living spring within, which never runs dry. The sparkles of life are ever there as bubbles on the heaving wave, giving significant token of the power of that endless life which is always at work underneath the smiling, calm, unruffled surface.

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* John 7. 40, 41. † Isa. 35. 7.

As from a full overflowing fountain streams of water are ever pouring forth to water and refresh the earth, so from an indwelling Christ, (this is a reality, not a fancy piece) from Christ "formed within" the soul of man, flows forth "rivers of living water." The symbol of all this was the flinty rock of the wilderness of Sinai, which struck by the rod of Moses, poured out water in such copious streams as to save both man and beast when perishing from thirst. "That Rock," we are told, "was Christ." What was passing now, was symbolized in the past history of the nation. The Jews knew this well; they were not so dull as not to see that Christ instituted the comparison; that the Rock of their fathers foreshadowed himself, and that God himself, taking on him our nature, was, this day, in the midst of his people. Hence it was some said, as we have before remarked, "This is of a truth the prophet" foretold by Moses, and whom they were commanded to obey, upon peril of all that was dear to them. while others yet more pointedly said, "This is the Christ." Without a doubt the words of Moses came back to them with great power, enforced by all the authority of Christ. Surely this last day of the Feast of the Tabernacles, this present year, the last of the ministry of our Lord, was a great day in Jerusalem. It was not so much miracles now as the words of Jesus that were for the most part so efficient. It was chiefly now as a "Teacher sent from God" that Jesus proclaimed his Messiahship.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FEAST OF THE DEDICATION.

It is as winter comes on the days grow more drear; the autumnal wind sighs among the branches; clouds, dark and angry, cross the face of the checkered sky, and the leaves fall dry and withered to the ground. In sunny climes the change is not quite so apparent; still in Palestine the traces of the fading year could be clearly discerned; and the feast whereof we now speak was held in winter. This feast was the last but one that Jesus would ever attend, and possesses from this fact, as well as from the teachings of Jesus, and the circumstances which transpired during its progress, increased interest in our eyes. The day of the gracious visitation of the Jewish nation was fast passing away, and he who had come to visit them "in great humility," would soon be seen no more. Alas, they knew not, as the world has never yet known, how to appreciate the presence of Christ among them! Now and then one would see this, as did the woman who said, from the very depths of her heart, and in all the fullness of her loving nature, "Blessed is the womb that bore thee! and the paps that gave thee suck." With all the strength of a true woman's loving heart she spake these words, and was ready to kiss the ground on which he trod, and which he consecrated by his bleeding footsteps.

It would seem, as well as we can judge, that Jesus did not return to Galilee after the vintage was over, and the Feast of Tabernacles closed, but remained in and around Jerusalem, principally occupied in teaching the people in the temple. There was no more reticence ; no more holding back the deepest truths, or hiding the Godhead that was enshrined, as the Shekinah in the tabernacle, in his humanity. He was no longer as one that hideth himself, according to an old and reiterated complaint of the children of Israel. He appeared in the temple publicly every day, regardless of the presence of his enemies, and of the open and avowed hostility of the Scribes and Pharisees, which increased in intensity with every succeeding day. At night he would retire to Mount Olivet, and to Bethany. Amid the shades of Olivet he found time for prayer and solitary communion ; in Bethany he reposed for the night, finding here food and sleep, and rest amid loving hearts, and under a friendly roof. If in the day time he was "compassed about as with bees," in the silent night he slept secure, and awoke each morning refreshed with sleep, and invigorated for the labors, duties, and trials of another day.

There was no haste, no perturbation, no impatience, no irritation. Each day as the morning sun arose, and Jesus entered through the gates into the city, passing thence by the eastern gate into the temple, he knew well, in human parlance, that it was at the hazard of his life ; of course he could not die until his hour was come, and his work was complete. Every hour brought that important day nigher and nigher.

It was now mid-winter; the season of the year when Judas Maccabæus restored the temple, rebuilt the altar, and renewed the fire which had ceased to burn for the space of some three years in commemmoration of which grand event in Jewish history was this feast instituted. Two short months then were about all that remained until the Passover, when by the death of Christ his work on earth would be consummated.

It is curious to note now the teaching of Jesus. How it infuriated the Jews! Neither can we fail to see clearly the cause of their dire hostility. With their view could they well avoid this? He claimed to be God, as they interpreted his language. There can be no mistake as to this. The Jews so understood him. When Jesus remonstrated with them for their mad attempt to stone him to death, asking them for which of his good works it was that they did this, "They answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy: and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God."*

The words used by our blessed Lord upon this memorable occasion, and which imperiled his life, were these: "I and my Father are one."†

The reply of Jesus to the charge of the Jews, "That Jesus being a man made himself God," is to the following import: In the Jewish Scriptures it is written "I said, ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High,"* and if this crowning epithet, this title of high distinction is none too great to be bestowed upon a being so "fearfully and wonderfully made" as man, "Say ye of Him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?"†

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* John 10. 33, † Ibid ver. 30.

Does Jesus, in the moment of danger, and under a charge, in the eye of the Jewish law, and according to the Jewish mind, so heavy, and of a capital nature, as that of blasphemy, go back upon his words, or seek in any wise to break their force? By no means: on the contrary he reaffirms what he has just said. Instead of seeking to disarm their rage by qualifying the statement, he enlarges upon it, and makes his meaning if possible still more unmistakable, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that THE FATHER IS IN ME, AND I IN HIM."‡

We have proof enough that Jesus did not flinch from his own testimony, did not yield in the least from the ground he had taken, by the fact, that the Jews still more infuriated, rushed forward in their blindness to vindicate the majesty of their violated law, and to inflict capital punishment upon the offender, "but he escaped out of their hand."§

During this feast of the dedication, which Jesus now attends for the last time, the question comes up again and again, presses indeed more earnestly than ever (as if they foresaw that the time of our Lord upon the earth was indeed short), "Art thou the Christ?" The clamor grew louder and louder, and every day intensified the anger of his enemies: as a river stopped in its course, gathers strength with every passing moment, and rising boisterously threatens to carry every thing before it, and pour devastation upon the surrounding country, so the rage of the Scribes and Pharisees growing fiercer by opposition and failure, instead of exhausting their enmity increased it, and they resolved at all hazards, and at whatever cost, to remove this "fellow," as they called him, from the earth. Either he must perish, or the people, instigated to rebellion upon the belief that Jesus was the Messiah, would bring the Romans upon them, to the ruin of the nation. As the feeling of the rulers on one side increased, and to effect their object they were more than ever determined to brave the populace, so the people on their side felt an increasing solicitude that Jesus should avow himself more definitely; not simply perhaps assuring them that he was their Messiah; but proclaiming himself King, and putting himself at their head.

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* Psa. 82. 6. † John 10. 34, 35, 36. ‡ John 10. 37, 38.
§ John 10. 39.

Before any great catastrophe in nature, or some impending evil threatening nations, there is a sound in the air, and a feeling among men which seems to warn of approaching danger. So now the people at this feast, as if an inward monitor warned, or some strange voice in the air was heard, sounding a note of alarm, crowded around Jesus in the temple, and just now in the eastern corridor (called Solomon's porch), importuning him more vehemently than ever before, to remove every doubt, by assuming command, and boldly meeting the danger before it might be too late. Eager were their looks; most earnest was their request. Gathering close to him, and pressing him on every side, they say, "How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ tell us plainly."*

How often had they asked this question; and how often, and in how many ways, had it been answered. What the Jews wanted, and what could not be granted at present, and during our Lord's first advent, was that he should take upon him the role of Joshua, and lead them on to victory. The testimony of John was well enough, the wonder-working power of Jesus was well enough, but this would not suffice; they looked for the "Star that was to come out of Jacob, and the Sceptre that should rise out of Israel," for a Prince and Ruler, who "coming out of Jacob should have dominion."† In the absence of this to them most significant and satisfactory sign, almost all that Jesus did and said went for little or nothing. If he did not raise his standard, and declare war against the Romans, the mass of the people went not with him. They resolved his miracles into magic, and opprobriously said that he was in league with the devil. "Say we not well," was their language, cast in his face time and again, "that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil."‡

Hence, on the present occasion, the persistency with which they urged Jesus to cast aside all disguise, to come out boldly, and declare, once for all, whether he was the Christ; and put an end to doubt by answering their highly-raised expectations as to what Messiah would actually do when he came among them.

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* John 10. 24. † Numb. 24. 17, 19. ‡ John 8. 48.

But their demand was unavailing; he had given them all the proof that was necessary save one, that of his resurrection, symbolized in the prophetic history of Jonah. The one was a fact, and the other, certainly no less marvelous, would be shown also to be, not a fancy picture, but a glorious reality, when as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so would Jesus during precisely the same period of time remain in the bowels of the earth: when having in his own dark domains destroyed the monster death, he would rise again; coming forth victorious in the strangest fight that ever yet was fought; conquering an enemy that until now had always been found invincible.

What were all the far-famed conquests of the Romans to this—what was even the mastery of the world? Who ever before left voluntarily the bright realms of light, and alone, unaided, entered the charnel-house of death, and engaging in mortal combat with man's greatest enemy, on his own vantage ground (where alone he could be conquered), slew him, extracted from him his deadly sting, and opened wide his gates for the release of all who had fallen under his dread dominion. "This additional sign you shall have," said Jesus to the Jews, "but none other."

Vain the attempt; most unsatisfactory the reply of Jesus. But amid the general defection, and wide spread disappointment, there were those with whom his words gained credence, even when his wondrous works failed to produce the desired effect. This shows, especially under the circumstances, which were dark and threatening at the time, and every day grew more so, the remarkable power which attended his teaching during these last days of his ministry on the earth; and this the more so from the fact that he positively asserted his Godhead. This gives to his teaching a solemn weight and sacredness, which, when it penetrated the heart, and found lodgment there, produced an impression more profound and lasting than the greatest of miracles.

Amid the raging of the sea, and the tumult of the waters, amid angry discussion and fierce invective, in peril of his life from day to day, by his own countrymen, Jesus appears in their midst, fearless, loving, conferring benefactions; curing the man blind from his birth; saving the woman taken in adultery, bidding her sin no more; scattering flowers in his pathway, and everywhere manifesting the same tender compassion that he had shown from the beginning, Amid the revilings that followed him, the plots against his life, his harassments from those who sought to entangle him in his talk, the efforts to suborn witnesses to swear away his life, Jesus, full of love, likens himself to "the good shepherd that giveth his life for the sheep."* "The hireling fleeth because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep;" but, says Jesus, "I am the good shepherd; and I lay down my life for the sheep."* Does our Lord, for a time, seem to evade the death which he knows awaits him? It is but for a time. His life is his own; it is that underived life which comes down from eternity. Its source will never be found; its duration will never be measured. It is his own, in a sense far beyond finite conception. He says himself, in most unmistakable language, "I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."†

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* John 10. 11.

Was not his life his own? Did it not lie with him to choose his own time? to fix the moment when his life should close? Steadily he marches to the appointed hour; but he must not move one step too slow, or one step too fast. All his steps have been measured—and shall not his death-march beat to time,—like the slow and measured footsteps of those who are walking in solemn procession, and with the sound of funeral dirge to the tomb. Jesus rises in majesty sublime in these last days; and like a pillar seems lost in the skies. Does he belong to the earth?—His feet seem scarcely to touch the ground. He was always great and beneficent, but never as now. His approaching end gave a double sanctity to all he said and did,—as the setting sun gilds the sky with his richest rays. But the activity of his enemies was such, their malevolence so fierce, that during the short interval that would elapse from mid-winter to the first spring months and the feast of the Passover, Jesus resolved to leave the city and retire to partial obscurity. But instead of returning to Galilee, as was his wont, he chooses a nearer place of refuge, and is seen no more in the streets or in the temple from day to day. Mount Olivet, and Bethany with its loved circle, are also left behind—Jesus withdrawing himself for a little season from the city and its environs.

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* John 10. 13, 14, 15. † John 13. 17, 18.

BOOK SEVENTH.

CHAPTER I.

JESUS RETIRES BEYOND THE JORDAN.

It is pleasant often, after the lapse of time, to revisit places endeared by former associations, or made memorable by circumstances that have had a marked influence on our after lives. Sometimes in the history of our own lives, when age has sobered the fancy, and the illusions of youth have been dispelled, when many years have made their annual round, we go back to an early home, long ago left, and not seen since, and recall the past, surveying a spot once so dear, and around which, as a vine about the oak, memory has ever since fondly and tenaciously clung. How short the time, how narrow the intervening space, though perhaps a half century has passed away, since sorrowfully we turned away from our home, now passed into the hands of an alien and a stranger. The course of events called us away, necessitated our departure, and now, young no longer, numbered ourselves (we who were once so buoyant) among the aged, we see the old homestead, we retread the ground, we survey the scene. There are the trees we planted so many years ago, then mere saplings, now large and flourishing; there is the house we built, like ourselves old and wrinkled, and worn with age. The general aspect of the country around is the same, but where were woods, large forests, are now seen rich, smiling fields; while the river as of old, unchanged, pursues its winding way.

Such a picture, drawn as if with the fading hues of even, but soft and golden, upon the memory, and associated with the events of a life-time crowded together in the interval, and now compressed into a small compass, never leaves us until we too pass away, and so our fitful history ends.

The spot which Jesus the Lord revisits, driven from Jerusalem by the incessant persecutions of his foes, is where he first came in the beginning of his ministry, and ere his baptism by John. In a village hard by the place of John's baptism, he lodged during his stay in this vicinity. Now he returns to it again; he is in another district, and this may have tended to his safety. He left Jerusalem, taking the usual route to Jericho and the Jordan. Jericho was then a busy city, and all around it lay a fertile plain, interspersed with palm trees, and the balsam plant, and irrigated by plenteous streams. The descent to the Jordan was from terrace to terrace, through flowery roads, or pathways, till the bank of the river was reached. Crossing by a boat, or a bridge, our Lord skirted the banks of the river through a blooming valley, until ascending to higher ground he found his old home again; the place where he lodged when first he entered upon his great work. Nearly three years and a half have passed since then; and what wonderful events have transpired during this brief period. Events not evanescent, like those recorded in history, but destined to leave their mark forever upon the past, and to affect the future through all time. All other records will fade, but these will live forever.

In the vicinity of the village, where Jesus, with his disciples lodged, was the wide, open, grassy spot where John, the "voice of one crying in the wilderness," preached to congregated thousands, and announced the advent of the Jewish Messiah. From the tomb his voice now came back repeating the announcement to which he was ever true, and which he had sealed with his dying testimony. Here, on the bank of the river, Jesus had stood when the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in the shape of a dove, and a voice was heard declaring Jesus to be the annointed of the Most High. Here John pointed out Jesus to his assembled countrymen as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," having, in common with all the prophets, received a supernatural revelation of the secret, otherwise impenetrable, of his sacrificial death, and its all-restoring effect upon our world. All these scenes come back to the memory, doubly endeared by all that had happened since, and made indelible. And now Jesus is here once more.* The house that received him then, opens its doors again for the Son of Man, and its inmates are favored for the last time with his hallowed presence.

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* John 10. 40.

It is soon known that Jesus is here, and people come to him from all parts. The discussion still goes on as to his real character. Some say one thing, some another ; these are in his favor, those are not. One thing, however, has its effect, in the minds of many who now resort here to see Jesus, and who had formerly attended the ministry and baptism of John. The place and the scene recall John's words ; they remember what he then said, how he extolled the name of Christ, and declared beforehand the "wonderful works" which he would perform. All this they faithfully recall, and now say one to another, in the hearing of the people, "John did no miracle : but all things that John spake of this man were true."* The result was highly favorable. These old attendants upon John's ministry, comparing his testimony with the words and works of Jesus, were now fully satisfied that John was not mistaken, that he had declared the truth, and "they believed on him there."†

This adherence to Christ at the present time, is more remarkable that the days are dark, and many falling away on the right hand and on the left who once called themselves his disciples, and were perhaps loud in their profession. These were comparatively days of sunshine, when it seemed as if nearly the whole land, as in the days of John's public ministry, was carried away by the mighty works of Christ, and the promises they afforded of the speedy deliverance of the nation from the Roman yoke. Doubtless they associated the one with the other; their motives being thus not so unselfish as appeared upon the surface. This is evident from what Christ said to the multitude who so closely followed him, after the miracle of the loaves and fishes: "Ye seek me," says Christ, "not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled."* They expected great temporal advantages from so powerful a prince; and this was at the bottom of their solicitude to make him king. The miracles were adjuncts; the steps of a ladder leading to power and earthly renown: appertaining indeed to the Messiah, and necessary to the accomplishment of his purpose, as the appointed deliverer of the nation, but not in themselves of so much importance apart from this. Hence the effect of this miracle passed away as soon as it did, not leading to a real faith in Christ as the Saviour of the world, and was followed by such a general falling away, because Jesus at their urgency would not proclaim himself their king, and take up arms against the Romans.

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* John 10. 41. † Ibid. ver. 42.

This great change began in Galilee, superinduced first by the rejection of the kingly crown, and then by the doctrine of Christ. As the close of his earthly career drew nigh, Jesus, as we have already seen, grew bolder in the announcement of his supreme Godhead. Calling himself "the Bread of Life," "giving his flesh for the life of the world," saying, "he that eateth me, even he shall live by me;"[*] these were astounding declarations, and in their blindness they exclaim, "This is an hard saying, who can hear it?"[†] As we have shown, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."[‡]

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* John 6. 26.

The same was the case in Jerusalem, when, his end drawing nearer and nearer, he went up to the feasts. At one of these annual festivals, having cured on the Sabbath day "a certain man which had an infirmity thirty and eight years," and who, when the pool was troubled by the descent of an angel, had not been able to avail himself of its healing virtue, the Jews were deeply offended, and sought to slay him, "because he had," as they said, (seeking ground for offense, not from any real regard for the sacredness of that holy day), "done these things on the Sabbath day." Rising up in the majesty of his strength, Jesus asserts his divine prerogative: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."[§] Here the whole Deity is seen; it is not shrouded as behind a veil within the Holy of Holies. It shines out like the sun. So the Jews understood it, and jealous for the honor of God, angered that any mere man should assume to himself such equality with the "great and mighty ruler of the universe," they rush upon our Lord with renewed violence, deeming such a blasphemer unworthy to live. We can be in no doubt as to their sentiments, or the interpretation which they put upon the words of Christ, for an apology for their violence;

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[*] John 6. 43, 51, 57. [†] Ibid. ver. 60. [‡] Ibid ver. 66.

[§] John 5. 17.

they say of Christ, "that he had not only broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God."* Awed as we are in reading these things, most jealous for God, his name, sole prerogative, and incommunicable attributes, for his glory, which he says he will not "give to another," we must rest in the natural and just interpretation of the language of Christ by those who heard what he said, as well as by the fact that Jesus, in what followed, not only did not deny, but confirmed the correctness of their interpretation. The calmness of his demeanor, and what he further said, must have had some effect, for they do not appear to have proceeded further against him, but allowed him to finish his heaven-born discourse in peace. A secret power which they could not resist withheld them from greater violence.

And now we come the Feast of Tabernacles; the last which our Lord attended, and to which reference has been made. The reader will recollect that we are tracing the steps, showing the cause, of the decline in the popularity of Christ, and how those who were once with him, even among the people, now turned away from him, and joined the growing cause of the Scribes and the rulers among the Pharisees. It was not, after all, so much the seeds of discord sown by the chief rulers, which divided the people, as the words of Christ himself; words which made him equal with God. Jesus could not forego his rightful claim—he must stand out in all the dignity of his divine nature; especially now as the end draws so near, and the curtain will soon fall on the darkest scene of time. Dark for awhile, but the darkness soon to pass away, and to be followed by the light of an endless day. The heavens may be clothed with blackness, and nature, sighing through all her works, mourn over the dire catastrophe; yet it is the world's salvation for all that. And who but God could accomplish such a result out of all the evil, sin, and misery of our race, almost from the very beginning of time.

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* John 5. 18.

It was, as we have seen, during the feast of the Tabernacles, that Jesus used the wonderful words, so descriptive of his "eternal power and Godhead, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink;" and which, with "many of the people," produced a greater effect than his miracles; for unconvinced before, despite all they had seen and known, unbelief fled away, faith in God took full possession of their minds, and they say, arranging themselves on the side of Christ, "Of a truth this is the prophet," while others said (possibly there was an almost imperceptible shade of difference in opinion), "This is the Christ."*

Not many days after, Christ, still lingering around Jerusalem, its walls and towers, in a long discourse with the Scribes and Pharisees, boldly declared, without the slightest ambiguity, his existence as anterior to that of Abraham, applying to himself the name Jah, which the Almighty empowered Moses to use in his conference with Pharaoh; and which the Egyptians would acknowledge as a sign from him who "is and was and is to be." From the storehouse of the past—from the depth of their knowledge of "the High and Holy One that inhabiteth eternity," derived from immemorial tradition—from their secret archives—from inscriptions on monuments and temples, this name, now first used in the communications God made to Moses, would be a reminder to Pharaoh, and give to the embassy of Moses a divine recognition. Jesus applies this name to himself; he claims it as truly and properly his own—it belongs to him by right, and to none other. This he asserts in the strongest and most direct terms. The Jews fiercely taking him up because he said of Abraham that he "rejoiced to see my day, and was glad," superciliously said, "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?" To this Christ replies, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM."*

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* John 7. 40.

Nothing stronger than this could be said. And by a Jewish form of speech, using the word "verily" twice, he affirms and reaffirms his essential, underived, eternal existence under the title "I AM," used by Jehovah of old.

So, in the same elevated strain, two or three months afterward, in the temple, during the feast of dedication, or soon afterward, while Jesus says of himself with a sublime simplicity, "I am the light of the world;"† he also on another occasion declares explicitly, "I and my Father are one."‡

These were the declarations, this was the doctrine, these were the words, so offensive, so audacious, so blasphemous, which led many of the common people to array themselves against Christ. While one party said, "This is the Christ," another said, "Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the Scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?"*

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* John 8. 38. † Ibid. ver. 12. ‡ John 10. 30.

Here was the stone of stumbling, the rock of offense. Nothing was so bad as this; "Because that Jesus being a man, made himself God."† Nothing to a Jew could be so abhorrent as this; nothing so richly deserving death, and justly so, if Jesus arrogated what did not of right belong to him. Shall puny man, a creature of yesterday, who has no power over his own life, whose breath is in his nostrils, apply to himself epithets, claim attributes, which belong solely and exclusively to God? Yet this is exactly what Jesus did, and never so much so, with such majesty of speech, and plainness in the use of words, banishing all metaphor, throwing off all disguise, as when he approached the close of his life. To his disciples, also, he spoke in the plainest manner of the Father, though as the Spirit was not yet given, they did not, until after his ascension into heaven, understand the import of his words.

But while many were highly offended because of these things, there were those who still clave to him; listening they believed, overcome by the divinity that clothed his words with such amazing power. Still the clamor grew so loud, the opposition so strong, the hostility so avowed, while so many fell away, leaving him the more exposed to the various assaults that were continually made upon his life, that, as we have seen, Jesus for safety was forced to leave the city and retire beyond the Jordan, still continuing his active work in the region where John, his forerunner, had formerly labored. The glory of the Lord had left Jerusalem the holy city, but as yet it hovered over the valley, and along the green banks of the Jordan. Yet it was but for a little while ; soon the glory would depart—step by step—slowly, lingeringly, leaving the land, this highly favored land, for good. Already Jesus had said, tenderly premonishing his own people, "Yet a little while I am with you, and then I go unto him that sent me."*

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* John 7. 41, 42. † Ibid. 10. 33.

CHAPTER II.

THE FEAST AT BETHANY.

It was while Jesus was beyond Jordan, and the winter was fast passing away, and he was re-surveying the ground consecrated by the ministry of John the Baptist, teaching those who resorted to him while he was here, that word came of the sickness of Lazarus whom he loved. Then followed in due time the raising of Lazarus from the dead, that remarkable manifestation of "the glory of God." After this Jesus retired for a little time to a city called Ephraim,* situated on the border of the wilderness of Judea, and of course not far from Jerusalem. This was his last refuge, or place of retirement and seclusion, and the time spent here was passed in complete privacy with his disciples, until the hour arrived to show himself at Jerusalem, knowing full well that the Sanhedrin had determined upon his death, and had expressly commanded "that if any man knew where he were, he should shew it, that they might take him."†

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* John 7. 33.

Undeterred by his knowledge of this decree of the Jewish council, fearless, composed, Jesus, six days before the feast of the Passover (instituted by himself), with his disciples, came to Bethany. Instead of going to the house of Martha, as if by previous arrangement, he went to the house of Simon, (a name very common among the Jews, as are some names with us), a leper, where "they make him a supper."‡

Never, perhaps does the human in Christ appear in so lovely a form—never perhaps do the qualities of gentleness, meekness, kindness, lovingness, shine forth with milder luster, or show themselves in guise so attractive, as when in ordinary life he sits down at some "good man's feast," or accepts an invitation from some Pharisee, who is influenced not so much by regard and admiration, as perhaps by ostentation and curiosity. We have three occasions in especial, if not more, of the kind, carefully recorded. One in Capernaum, where Matthew, or Levi, was the entertainer; one somewhere in Galilee, where Simon, a Pharisee, was the host; and which occurred in the earlier part of our Lord's ministry, during the imprisonment of John the Baptist; and one in the village of Bethany, at the house of Simon the leper, six days before the Passover. There was not one of them at which Jesus did not, in one form or other, receive some severe rebuke, administered if not openly before his face, yet so that it came to his knowledge, and met with a ready and suitable reply. In Capernaum, where Matthew, or Levi, (now become his disciple) made a feast on a large scale, and liberal himself, perhaps from the nature of his office, invited both Gentiles and tax-gatherers to be present—the rigid Pharisees took offense at this intermixture, and said, addressing themselves to his disciples, "Why eateth your master with publicans and sinners."*

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* John 11. 54 † Ibid. 11. 57.

‡ Compare John 12. 1. with Matt 26. 6.

There was no question that our Saviour would answer more readily than this; and he was glad, no doubt, of this public opportunity (for "many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples") to show the expansiveness of his love; how it embraced both Gentile and Jew; how it overleaped the narrow bounds of Judaism, and drew to its fond embrace, without respect to name, or nation, all of the human race that needed his help, or would receive, as a balm for every wound, and a cure for otherwise irremediable grief, his life-giving, soul restoring word. In the reply he made to their captious question, Jesus says, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* Sacrifice is right, for it is a divine ordinance, instituted from the beginning by God; but it is a means to an end, and not to be rested in as having any intrinsic value. Love and mercy are of God, they belong to the divine nature; and man resembles God, becomes a "partaker of the divine nature," in proportion as he "does justly, loves mercy, and walks humbly with his God."† A heart imbued with divine love, dwelling in that childlike simplicity which flows from pure love, is "merciful, even as God is merciful." It does not magnify molehills into mountains; it is never intolerant; it does not lay every body on the bed of Procustes; it is pitiful, tender-hearted, considerate. These ostentatious Pharisees, sour, cold-hearted, hypocritical, would substitute a rigid adherence to the ceremonial law, even in its minutest forms, for the godlike quality of mercy, and all the virtues of equity, truth, and justice, which flow from this source. What a just rebuke did they receive! And how did the compassion, benignity, and tender love of Jesus, shine forth on this occasion, in contrast with their harsh and intolerant judgment. It was as the showers which soften the earth, as gently they descend upon the parched ground, watering and enriching it, reviving the withered herb and faded grass, making everything to bloom anew, and scatter its fragrance far around.

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* Matt. 9. 1.1

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* Matt. 9. 12, 13. † Micah 6. 8.

We pass on to the feast given by Simon the Pharisee. His incivility, his want of courtesy as a host to an invited guest, so marked, but which at first Jesus did not notice, show that he lacked the very first elements of a Jewish gentleman and a true Israelite. Rude he was to his guest; nay more, boorish; neglecting all the usual forms of hospitality common on such festive occasions. No water was brought Jesus to wash his bare feet; no oil was poured upon his head to refresh him wearied with labor and after the heat of the day; and above all, the kiss of peace, the customary salutation, was withheld. This treatment toward an invited guest, one whose name stood so high, whose works and teaching had made him a wonder among men, was neither more nor less than a premeditated insult, of the broadest and most reprehensible character, in the sight of all the company. It was Simon that sought his guest, not his guest him. The least he could do was to treat him with common civility, not with downright rudeness from the first moment he entered his house. It is difficult to account for such gratuitous discourtesy unless it was in part to please certain guests who, from what we read of them, entertained unfavorable opinions of Christ, and Simon thought thus to propitiate them, while at the same time he gratified his own wishes by inviting Christ to his house, an act perhaps somewhat derogatory to his own high position in the social scale.

During the entertainment, Christ sitting at the table with those who, probably, belonged to the highest class of Jewish society, a woman entered the room where the supper was laid, and placed herself in a lowly posture at the feet of Jesus, as he reclined on the triclinium, or couch, according to the Greek and Roman fashion of those times. The entrance of the woman, her slow and trembling approach to Christ, the position she assumed at his feet, could be seen from without by those who were standing about the porch, as it was customary with the wealthy on public occasions to leave the whole suite of rooms on the lower floor exposed to public view, hall, court, saloon, picture gallery, even to the outermost limits of the garden in the rear, lengthened out to the eye by a painted perspective landscape. And inasmuch as the multitude followed Jesus everywhere, and if they did not enter with him into every private house that received him, crowded around the doorway or porch of the dwelling, what now transpired was witnessed by many outside, as well as by the company seated around the table, and the numerous servants that waited on them.

Without saying a word, without explanation or apology; sore pressed with a sense of guilt and shame; having nothing to plead by way of extenuation, unable any longer to endure the pangs of a wounded spirit; knowing the compassion of Jesus; appreciating his character, office and mission, as the Saviour of the world; having nowhere else to go; an alien from society, estranged from home and friends; a lonely wanderer in the wide, wide world; fallen from innocency, stained by crime, straying further and further from the path of peace and happiness—

she casts herself, as we have seen, in this public manner at the feet of Jesus, in the midst of this aristocracy. Not looking up, but clasping his feet, her face hidden by her long, disheveled hair, she washes them with her tears, imprinting them with many a kiss drawn from love's deepest source, a contrite and broken heart. Love had done the work. Like others of her forlorn class, she had often listened to his words, seen his wonderful works, drawn to him by the report that had gone abroad, and which had reached every corner of the land. The sympathy that moved his bosom found a responsive chord in this tender, susceptible heart; her eyes were opened to her estrangement from one so good, so pure so just, by her violation of the moral law; and anxious to return the love which glistened in his eye, and warmed his heart, and quickened his beating pulse and throbbing breast, she turned resolutely from every evil way, from the sin that had so easily beset her, hating what once she loved even to the loss of her good name and the dearest hopes of her young life, and solicitous above every thing in the world to show her return to virtue, to personal purity, by the entire sacrifice of herself to Christ. Her heart, breaking with grief and love, was as a fountain newly opened, and poured itself forth in floods of repentant tears, a copious, unceasing stream, absolutely irrepressible. The long pent up grief had at last found vent; upon the bare feet of Jesus her burning tears fell, rolling down her fair but pallid cheek in quick succession, intermingled with sobs and sighs; and when those drooping eyes were raised they beamed with nothing but love to the Saviour. At length her grief somewhat abating, and her tears ceasing to flow, she raised herself partly up, and taking her long glossy hair, which reached even to the ground, she wiped away her tears with those flowing tresses, at the same time repeatedly kissing his feet in the self-forgetfulness of her most ardent love. Never was love more simple, sweet and tender ; and it was produced by the love of Christ. It emanated from heaven, and showed its divine origin by its corresponding effects upon a human soul.

And now a murmur arose in that richly decorated hall, with its lofty columns, its ceiling of cedar, curiously carved and ornamented, not with mythological figures, but with flowers and vines, emblems of the clime—Greek and Roman designs being copied to a certan extent, but not so as to infringe the law. The murmur came from those seated around the various boards, in consequence of the strange scene presented to their view. Their dignity was offended ; their nice sense of what was proper and becoming. The intrusion of such a woman, her audacity, her reception by Christ, his ready acceptance of the homage she paid ; the absence of repulsion, the smile that played upon that face ; the look of welcome ; all combined to fill with amazement and ill-concealed disgust those present, so righteous in their own eyes. As for Simon, half doubting Christ from the first—he gave him up—and was now satisfied that he had no claim to the character of a prophet ; and doubtless regretted his invitation. He felt himself lowered in his own estimation and that of his honored guests.

"This man," he said to himself, "if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner."*

Jesus reading his thoughts, met them by supposing a case of two debtors, one owing fifty, the other five hundred pence; neither of them having anything to pay, he frankly forgave them both. "Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?" There could be but one answer, in the nature of the case, to this; of course Simon replied: "He to whom he forgave most." Our Lord then contrasts Simon's cold, distant, hardly civil treatment, with that of this woman, thereby reading him a lesson which probably he never forgot, and completely vindicating his cordial reception of one who, until this happy hour, was an outcast from society. Had her sins been great? When as a thick cloud they were blotted out, her love was in proportion to the mercy she had received. It was beyond all telling; it could only be expressed by action. Her tears, her prostrate form, her anguish at the recollection of her past life, her holy resolves, her sense of the forgiving love of Jesus, all betokened a heart subdued, and the beginning of a new life in the future. She could not love enough. The world's cold gaze was lost in the forgiving smile of Jesus.

But our Lord does not stop here. Knowing the depth of her penitence, sympathizing in her sorrow, feeling that "she loved much," conscious of her deep and agonizing desire to lead a new life, he uses his divine prerogative, and says to the woman, "Thy sins are forgiven,"

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* Luke 7. 39..

Were they chagrined, mortified, and disgusted before—they now have more serious ground of offense. They "say within themselves, who is this that forgiveth sins also?" Their inward thought was the same as that of the Scribes, who when Jesus, in the case of the sick of the palsy, pronounced "the absolution and remission of his sins," said, "Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?"* But their unbelief did not hinder her joy; a load, an intolerable load of grief and sin was removed from her oppressed heart; she laid down her burden at the feet of Jesus; her eye danced with gladness, and her soul was filled to overflowing with divine love. If not quite a translation from earth to heaven, it was a transformation so complete, so transparent, that her whole being was changed within and without, and her face shone as with the glory of the Lord. Was not this one of those true, loving women, who late at the cross, and early at the sepulchre, clung unchangingly to Christ until the last, and was found among those women who even before the disciples were favored with the knowledge of the resurrection of their Lord.

We now come to the supper at Bethany, six days before the Passover, in the house of Simon the leper. Around the feast in Bethany a solemn sadness gathers, knowing as we do the end so near;

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* Luke 5. 21.

but it is relieved by an act of love and devotion similar to that which occurred in the Pharisee's house. Each to show her love brought an alabaster box of ointment, very costly, and poured it on the head of Jesus, but here the comparison ends. The design of the one was very different from that of the other; the one was a tribute of the heart's best affection; the other (anticipating the death and burial of Christ) was memorial in its character, whether Mary understood it or not. Of this we cannot be sure, but she was certainly moved by a divine impulse. The words of our Saviour assure us of this: "Against the day of my burying hath she kept this."*

Whatever Mary did was in faith. She possessed a peculiarly meek and quiet spirit; and was greatly beloved by our Lord. It may be he unfolded to her as to none else the secret of his dying love; and as the words would seem to intimate, she had previously prepared this box of precious ointment expressly for this sacred purpose.

When one of our Lord's disciples, sitting with him at meat, under pretense of zeal for the poor, found fault with what he called this wastefulness; though Jesus knew his heart, and how false the pretense was, as tinsel to cover his greed, and hide it from the eyes of others—how meekly Jesus replies; vindicating this pious act of Mary's; announcing prophetically the nature of the act, and shielding her from blame. As for Judas, unhappy Judas, he leaves him to his own thoughts; Judas asking himself perhaps the while, whether that discerning eye had not seen beneath the surface and detected his secret motive. But no glance of unkindness was cast towards the offender; neither was there any asperity in the tone of our Saviour's voice—nothing harsh or grating in the words that he used. There was nothing that was not tender, loving and kind, even so far as this double minded disciple was concerned, who was, it is probable, even then inwardly resolving to betray his master.

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* John 12. 7.

This feast given by Simon the leper out of regard and respect to Christ was made memorable not only by the loving act of loving Mary, but by the presence of her brother, who was seated at the table, and who had been recently raised from the dead, after lying in the cold embrace of death four days.* This event was fresh in the minds of all, and many were present "not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazurus also, whom he had raised from the dead." The relation of Jesus to this family, to Lazarus, and his two sisters, Martha and Mary, is one of the most pleasing incidents of his life. It brings him nearer to our own hearts and homes. It makes him as one of us, one with us. Bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh. His human nature was as our nature, sympathetic, susceptible of the tenderest emotions of friendship and love. What an exhibition we have of this as he stands by the grave of Lazarus, and witnesses the grief of the sisters at the loss of a brother so dearly beloved. The Son of Man weeps; he mingles his tears with theirs Those present notice this, and they say, "Behold how he loved him!"* Ah! could the veil be lifted up that hides this domestic history, and Jesus be seen in his relation to this family, his outgoings and his incomings, the love that beamed in his face, his daily intercourse, the fragrance of his presence, the intimate communion that bound them together, the oneness of the sacred tie, heart finding fellowship with heart, our love to our exalted Saviour would be as the love of a man to his fellow, and we would know how to appreciate those words of his to his dear disciples, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."†

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* John 11. 39.

The feast, and the resurrection of Lazarus, tend to withdraw this family from the obscurity of their private life, but chiefly they show us Jesus as a man in his loveliest aspect, as the dearest friend; as susceptible like us of the emotions of grief and joy; and great as is his power, all-commanding as is that voice which says to the dead, "Lazarus, come forth,"‡ it is his love that wins our hearts; and his love, this human love, this fellow feeling of another's woe, is, after all, greater than his power. The power over death and the grave would be comparatively as nothing were it not conjoined with that love which, imparted to us, is sweeter than life and stronger than death. It is this which binds heaven and earth together, and assures us that sooner or later it will subdue all things to itself, make harmony out of discord, and blend all hearts in one.

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* John 11. 36. † Ibid. 15. 14. ‡ Ibid. 11. 43.

CHAPTER III.

APPEAL OF BLIND BARTIMEUS TO JESUS AS THE SON OF DAVID.

We linger yet awhile outside the walls of the city of the great King; we stop a moment to listen to a cry for mercy built on the knowledge of Jesus as the Son of David. This narrative is given here, not perhaps exactly in the order of time or place, but nevertheless as preliminary of what will next follow—the public entry of Jesus into Jerusalem—and because, also, it bears directly upon his Messiahship, which this book, written in his name, and for his dear sake, keeps, or endeavors to keep, constantly in view of the reader.

As our Lord, on his way to Jerusalem, from beyond Jordan (some little time, perhaps, before the supper in Bethany), was passing out of Jericho, he was saluted by a cry to which his ears were ever open. No cry was more effectual. It was an acknowledgment of his Messiahship, and of course of his right, as the Son of David, to sit on the throne of David. There was nothing in the outward condition of this man to recommend him to the notice of Christ, speaking as we ordinarily do of such things; for he was a poor beggar, sitting by the wayside and asking alms of those passing by; such an one as we to-day so often see as we pass along the streets. The crowd was great, and the murmur of the throng, and the loud tread of numerous footsteps, caused him to cry aloud, lifting up his voice shrill and clear above all the noise, and with ceaseless importunity, saying over and over again, insomuch that the constant appeal was clamorous and annoying: "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me."* Jesus seemed not to hear, and his footsteps were dying away in the distance, or if not so, the present opportunity would soon pass away, and it might be the last; when louder, still louder than before the appealing cry arose, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Whence had this poor blind man, his name is recorded (and well it might be, in view of his condition and his strong faith), Bartimeus, son of Timeus, the knowledge or the intuition which urged this effectual appeal? Came it in the whispering wind, as from afar? Came it with the voice of the multitude? Certainly not. Until now he had not met Christ, the sound of his voice had not fallen upon his ear. But he had heard of him; a thousand voices had brought to his knowledge the wonderful works of Jesus, perhaps especially the cure of the man blind from his birth, which had lately excited so much opposition to Jesus in Jerusalem, on the part of the chief rulers among the Jews. It may be, also, that as his residence was in Jericho, he had heard in the past the voice of John, and his testimony of Jesus (God is ever working by means, both in nature, providence and grace), and this poor man, shut out from the light of day, may have pondered the more deeply his words, and felt their truth and power in his soul. Besides, his blindness was an accident of his life, and before this grievous misfortune befell him, as many a Jew in humble life had done, he may have diligently read the Holy Scriptures, especially those parts which are called Messianic, and relate to Christ.

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* Luke 18. 38.

These would necessarily be dear to every Jew; so interwoven were they with the future well-being of the nation. Upon the throne of David was Messiah to sit, crowned King of the Jews, and he was to be most emphatically the Son of David. However ages might elapse, and the reins of government slip temporarily out of the hands of his descendants, yet, sooner or later, Messiah, of the royal line of David, would ascend the throne—"the government would be upon his shoulders, and of his kingdom there should be no end."

Whatever may be the pertinency of these remarks to the individual in question, one thing is certain, before he had come within the sound of the Saviour's voice, or been the subject of his mercy, he had learned to believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Saviour of the world. Hence the strength of his faith and his present most urgent importunity; never for a moment doubting in his heart the willingness and ability of Christ to remove his blindness—otherwise incurable. The moment therefore Jesus asks of him, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" he replies as a child would, "neither fearing nor doubting," "Lord" (note this) "that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee.* And immediately he received his sight."

Here we have a striking exemplification of the passage of Scripture wherein it is so positively declared, "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."† Bartimeus acknowledges Jesus as "Christ the Lord," and Jesus commends his faith in him, "Thy faith hath saved thee."

While it is true that Bartimeus here calls Jesus "Lord," it is not likely that he understood this term as yet in the higher sense which he did afterward. Not long before Jesus had put this question to the Jews; "How say they that Christ is David's son? And David himself saith in the book of Psalms, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool. David therefore calleth him Lord, how is he then his son?"‡

This question, so plainly put, in which David "by the Holy Ghost" calls Jesus "Lord," could not be understood and answered (save in a few exceptional cases) until the day of Pentecost, when Jesus having ascended on high sent down the Holy Ghost, and so fulfilled the promise of the Father. Then the veil would be removed, and as with new eyes, with opened vision, on which no film was left to cloud even partially the sight, they would find to their great amazement that Jesus, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah," was "the Root of David,"* as well David's son.

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* Luke 18. 41, 42. † Matt. 21. 22.

‡ Luke 20. 41-44. Psa. 110. 1.

Meanwhile, until the full rising of "the bright and morning star," the appeal to Jesus as the Son of David, so strongly urged by blind Bartimeus, would be found all-efficacious; no appeal, indeed, more so.

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* Revelations 5. 5.

BOOK EIGHTH.

CHAPTER I.

THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM.

WE have paused a moment on the road to introduce the striking incident narrated in the preceding chapter, partly because it speaks of Jesus as "the Son of David," and to this extent prepares the way for the popular acclaim as he entered Jerusalem, and was hailed by his true title as "King of the Jews." Not that the multitude understood what this triumphal shout really meant, for they could not divest their minds of the notion of a temporal king. They clung to this false view, as did also the disciples, to the last. The death of Jesus on the cross, and his visible ascension into heaven, must take place, before this expectation, so strong, so imbedded in their minds, could be wholly relinquished.

The morning after the feast in Bethany, the odor of the ointment that filled the house having hardly passed away, and but five days before the Passover now remaining (days crowded with events), Jesus prepared to make his public entrance into Jerusalem. During the winter he had come up to the feast of dedication, "not openly, but as it were in secret,"* not appearing until "about the midst of the feast." This was done from prudential reasons; but now, five days before the Passover, and in the most public manner, facing his foes as a lion at bay, Jesus prepares to ride at mid-day into the city, in company with his disciples, attended by a great multitude of people.

There was just now a temporary reaction among the common people in favor of Jesus. One reason for this was, "many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves."† These were less prejudiced against Christ, and were more inclined to receive his wonderful works as attestations of his Messiahship. Beside this, the cure of the man born blind, his immediate restoration to sight, and the publicity given to it by the investigation of the Sanhedrin, with their signal failure to weaken or explain away the testimony of the man himself; and yet more recently the raising of Lazarus from the dead, witnessed by so many Jews who were present at the time, and which had created an immense sensation, all combined to raise the enthusiasm of the people to the highest pitch, and for the moment it seemed as if even the opposition of the Sanhedrin would be swept away before the strong current of popular feeling. So high indeed rose the tide, so powerful was the impression which was produced, that the High Priest and the council secretly resolved to put Lazarus to death, to destroy this living witness of the power of Christ to ransom even from the tomb. Among the excited, expectant multitude in the city, now greatly increased by the near approach of the Passover, there was but one anxious inquiry, one all-pervading cry, "What think ye, that he will not come to the feast?"*

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* John 7. 10.   † John 11. 55.

Among the Romans a triumph was a barbarous spectacle. Not only were the rifled spoils of conquered nations drawn in gilded cars displayed to view, not only was the conqueror adorned with all the regalia of a crowned monarch, not only was it lengthened out and its interest increased by the number and variety of rare and magnificent objects and trophies of victory, but behind the triumphal car walked a long train of miserable captives; even kings and queens, the most illustrious prisoners, were compelled in sad procession to grace the conqueror's triumph. Neither was this all. Not content with their degradation, the most honored of the unhappy victims, overcome in war, were destined to a cruel if not a lingering death by slow starvation. No feeling of pity seemed to visit those insensate hearts; nothing generous or high minded actuated them, even in the flush of victory, or on the day of triumph. Cold, proud, presumptuous, vainglorious, exulting in their ephemeral display, they had no thought to bestow on any but themselves, no compassion for the vanquished. Placing their feet on the necks of the conquered, casting them as food to wild beasts, they vainly thought administered to their own dignity and self-exaltation.

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* John 11. 56.

The triumph of Christ Jesus our Lord was not like this. There was nothing sad in this spectacle, nothing vainglorious here. The day it is likely was soft and bright, the balmy air of opening spring fanned gently the cheek; the fresh green grass, and the flowers newly blown, and diffusing fragrance far and wide, enameled the roadside; the trees were putting forth their leaves, and all nature resuscitated welcomed his approach who giveth both the early and the latter rain. All was peaceful, at that time, in the nation; there was neither war nor the alarm of war; and though the nation was restless under its present rule, there were as yet few symptoms of discord, and the black cloud of ruin was not yet seen in the sky, or at least was no bigger than a man's hand. The temple and the city stood in all their glory; and the whole land, free from drouth, pestilence and war, populous, productive, and teeming with plenty, enjoyed a short respite from nearly every ill.

Even the Roman government was not oppressive; it in no way interfered with their religious rites, but left the people to the full enjoyment of their law, with all their peculiar customs, and their belief in one God, in opposition to the polytheism that prevailed among all other nations.

Before entering the city—heretofore always approached on foot—our Lord sent two of his disciples from Bethany to an adjacent village to procure "a colt the foal of an ass," on which to ride, that the Scripture might be literally fulfilled, as spoken by

Zechariah the prophet, nearly five hundred years before: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."* The two disciples following the direction of their Lord, at the entrance of the village, at a place where two roads met, close by the door of a house, "found an ass tied, and a colt with her."† Without even asking permission, they proceeded, in the presence of the owner, to unloose them, and bring them away. Being interrogated as to this, they reply, "the Lord hath need of him." This was sufficient. The rightful owner knew who this was; there was no hesitancy; he felt greatly honored by the request; and as Jesus assured the disciples would be the case before they went, "straightway he let them go."‡

Every step on this progress to the city was a marked step. While on the way—we cannot determine the exact spot or time—(though before the arrival of Jesus and his disciples at Bethany, as it appears to us) while Jesus was walking alone, and in advance of the rest, moving probably with a slow and measured step—something unusual occurred—something in the appearance of Jesus as he "went before them;" for we read that the twelve disciples "were amazed; and as they followed, were afraid."§ Whatever it was that caused their fear, it lasted some time; for as they walked along and followed, it was seen by them—filling them with wonder and awe. It was doubtless "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord."* Though what form it took, what was "the appearance of the glory," we are not told. It was the divinity within which shone forth for a brief season with supernal splendor; and seems to have been a preparation for that dark eclipse which was so soon to follow in the surrender of their master to the Jews; with his trial, condemnation, sentence, and speedy death.

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* Zech. 9. 9. † Matt. 21. 2. ‡ Mark 11. 3, 6.

§ Mark 10. 32.

As confirmatory of this view, we read, that when the glory had passed away, Jesus took the twelve, and in the most circumstantial manner, "began to tell them what things should happen unto him, saying, Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles; and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again."†

The two disciples having succeeded in their mission, all happening as Jesus had foretold before they set out, they brought the ass and the colt to Bethany and Bethphage. The disciples having brought the colt, "whereon never man sat,"‡ "cast their garments upon him: and Jesus sat upon him." By this time the news of the approach of Jesus, with his disciples, had spread abroad, and the multitude pouring tumultuously forth from the gates of the city, the neighboring villages, also, sending forth their crowds, both men women, and children, the whole distance, nearly two miles, from Mount Olivet and Bethany to the city, was densely thronged with anxious, eager spectators. Among other causes conspiring to produce this striking spectacle, was the raising of Lazarus from the dead. This, as we have before said, had a great effect upon the people. This fact is expressly stated ; it is not an inference of ours. We read, "For this cause the people also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle."* All those Jews dwelling in Jerusalem and the neighboring villages, who were present "when Jesus called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead,"† gave their attestation to the miracle, and by their united testimony left no room for doubt in the minds of the great mass of the people. A sort of delirium seized them ; they were wild with joy ; their Messiah, their long expected King, had now come ; the Roman yoke would be taken off from their necks ; the year of jubilee had arrived ; the emancipation of the nation was at hand. It was a joyful hour. Their nation would now take its place as first in rank, supreme in power. Even the disciples shared in the general delusion, and were carried away by the intoxication of the hour. Among these James and John, or their mother on their behalf, and with their concurrence, asked for the two highest posts in the coming kingdom, about, as they deemed, to be immediately established.‡

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* Ezek. 1, 28. † Mark 10. 32, 33, 34. ‡ Ibid. 11. 2.

Seated on the colt, with no other trappings than the garments of his disciples—the young animal, never before carrying a rider, obedient to his voice—though it would seem that there was neither bit nor bridle, Jesus, the center of "a very great multitude," leaving Olivet and Bethany, set out for the city, amid the acclamations of all the people. All opposition was for the moment drowned amid the general joy, and even the chief priests and scribes could do nothing at present to divert the rushing stream from its course. In every way the people strove to express the rapturous exultation that swelled their bosoms; there had been no such public demonstration as this before. The magnificent causeway that (if we recollect aright), was then built across the valley and brook Kedron, was lined with spreading trees, both for ornament and shade. Many had climbed these trees to get a better sight, and as Jesus passed slowly along, "meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt, the foal of an ass,"* (a Hebraic poetical form of expression) they cut down branches and "strewed them in the way," while others in their great joy, almost forgetful of themselves, spread their garments along the path he rode, thus seeking to honor their King. No obstructions were put in the way of this celebration by the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate; the demonstration gave rise to no disturbance; all passed along peaceably, and gave rise to no jealousy on the part of the government.

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* John 12. 18 † Ibid. ver. 17. ‡ Mark 10. 35, 36.

As Jesus approached nearer the city, and was about to enter through the gates, the noise grew louder and louder, the very heavens were rent with the sound, as all voices, like the noise of many waters, joined in one general acclaim: "Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest!"*

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* Matt. 21. 5.

But this broad space, this bright sky, must not be without its shadow, as hardly any day is so cloudless throughout as not to have some passing obstruction to hide for a moment or so the sun from our eyes. How fair was the city then! How firm it stood, as if built on the rock. How secure, under the protection of the Roman eagles. The high walls and towers torn down by Pompey, when he took the city, had been rebuilt, and stood higher, firmer, stronger than before. The city itself, like Damascus, stood as in the center of a garden, amid trees and orange groves, and orchards, and running waters. There was nothing bare, bleak, or desolate about it then. Roses perfumed the air, and apple-tree blossoms covered the ground. It looked as if it might run parallel with the ages, instead of having erelong the ploughshare pass through the hill of Zion, then covered with palaces, the dwellings of the wealthy, and blooming as a garden; with its terraced flowery lawns in every direction sloping the hill sides towards the south.

But there was a pause—a solemn pause. By degrees, as from a cause unknown, silence, deep and long, succeeded these notes of joy—this voice of praise. Jesus stopped and surveyed the fair city, and the pleasing scene around. What thoughts came into his all-prescient mind! Yet a few swiftly passing years, and Jerusalem, in the reign of Vespasian, would be encompassed with armies, under the leadership of his son Titus; and the goodly city, with the temple, with its rich gifts, the offerings of piety and sacred veneration, would be entirely destroyed. The very foundations of the city would be upturned; and of the temple, with all its grandeur and costly magnificence, not one stone would be left upon another. The sun rising in effulgent splendor upon Mount Olivet would shine upon as wide spread desolation as was ever beheld; and leave on the page of history a picture of wrath and distress such as the world never saw before, and will never see again. Wives, children, and mothers would be involved in the common ruin; and war, famine, pestilence and burning, and the rage and rivalry of brethren, with the relentless fury of the enemy, would sweep as a scourge in a few short months, a million of human beings into eternity; leaving still unnumbered captives to be sold as slaves for the glutted foreign market. At the sight in perspective we read that "Jesus wept;" and this was the lamentation that he uttered—his bosom keenly alive to human sympathy—deeply moved by the woes, the long train of evils, which their rejection of him would bring upon his countrymen; not only now, but through the vista of years to come.

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* Matt. 21. 9. Hosannah is the Greek form for the Hebrew word; and means "Save now;" "Send now deliverance." It has also the force of the Hebrew word Hallelujah; Praise the Lord.

Jesus described at another time the ruin of his own people, using the most tender imagery, drawn from a familiar, every day object; comparing his care over them, had they permitted him to exercise it, to that of a "hen who gathereth her chickens under her wings."* Varying his phraseology he now thus speaks—as he "beheld the city, and wept over it," saying, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another: because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."†

Many changes had this city seen in the course of a thousand centuries. Through various revolutions it had passed from the time of king David, and Solomon his son, until now. Days of prosperity and adversity; of piety, declension, and general apostasy from the worship of the one living and true God. Again and again had its sacred altars been overthrown, and its sanctuary been defiled by profane hands; by an Antiochus Epiphanes and a Pompey; and its perpetual fire put out; as often had it risen from ruin and desolation, a monument of the unchangeable purpose and untiring faithfulness of Almighty God toward a city in which he had put his name; and the peculiar designation of which in the ages to come is yet to be, "THE LORD IS THERE."‡

But never before had it seen such a day as this.

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* Matt. 23. 37. † Luke 19. 41–44. ‡ Ezek. 48. 35.

The imagination pauses, filled with sacred awe, in contemplation of the deeply solemn scene, when, as Jesus entered the city through the eastern gateway, the vast assemblage, with one loud acclaim broke forth anew, saying only what was literally true,—"Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest."*

The whole city heard the shout, the noise, the trampling of many feet, the announcement of the entry into the city of their King. This name was on thousands of thousands of voices, and rang through city and temple far and near. Already strangers from many lands, as well as Jews from every section of the country, were pouring into the city to keep the Passover, the great feast of the year, and running together, they ask, "Who is this?" The response is, "This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee."† The enthusiasm of the populace had reached its highest point; the noise of the waves, the voice of the people, carried for the time everything before it, and the whole city was at the command of Jesus.

In the past Jesus had repressed popular enthusiasm; he curbed it as he did the waves of the sea when they rose tempest high. But now he lets the reins lie loose in his hand; he permits the winds to blow high, and the waves to war, rising and ascending high toward the sky. When certain Pharisees remonstrated with him on the uproar, and said, "Master, rebuke thy disciples," he replied, "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."[*] And when, toward the close of this selfsame day, as he entered the temple, the children crowding around our Lord, made the welkin ring, crying out, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" the chief priests and Scribes in one voice begged him to silence their vociferous shouts, Jesus said unto them, "Yea, have ye never read, out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?"[†]

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* Luke 19. 38.

† Matt. 21. 10, 11.

But the day was fast passing; the evening shades would soon appear; and this triumphal day, on which Jesus reigned supreme in his own city, as Melchisedec in Salem, would be passed not to return, until in the end of the days, the nation illuminated from above, should unitedly say, acknowledging Jesus to be their Messiah, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."[‡]

Still something yet remained to be done, before the memorable day and its labors were over, and its triumph ended. The temple had anew to be cleansed, which Jesus did, none opposing. Also there were the dumb and lame to be healed, which Jesus also did, in the temple, in the presence of all the people, and of the Scribes and Pharisees (little room for concealment or exorcism here), and then as Mark reads, "having looked round about upon all things,"[§] taken a last survey, a last, long, lingering, pitying look, as one casts an eye, a sad, tender glance upon objects held most dear, Jesus prepared to leave the temple as the gates were about to close for the night, and also the city, and to return after the agitation and toil of the day to Bethany, to the loved circle that he left in the early morning.

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[*] Luke 19. 40. [†] Matt. 21. 16. [‡] Ibid. 23. 39.

[§] Mark 11. 11.

As eventide drew on the clamor of the day was hushed; pensive, sad and silent, we may imagine Jesus wending his way along, no feeling of elation moving that subdued breast, for well he knew how soon, as in a theater, the scene would shift, and the note of joy and triumph be exchanged for the infuriated cry of his murderers; and the re-establishment of the kingdom of Israel be deferred to a future and yet more glorious day. Meanwhile night in the country has come on in all its peacefulness; the last rays of departing day have ceased to touch the highest point of Mount Olivet; the mountain itself, from top to base, is hidden by the shades of night; Bethany is shrouded in darkness; and all its inmates—the Son of Man sleeping there also—have sunk to rest under the peaceful roof of the home of Martha and Mary, with Lazarus, their brother.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHIEF PRIESTS, SCRIBES, AND ELDERS, IN COUNCIL.

FOUR days yet remained before the feast of unleavened bread. These were days of unceasing activity. During all this time Jesus taught daily in the temple. There was no attempt to hide from the presence of his enemies, or evade those who most anxiously sought his life. Never were his discourses sharper; they were as arrows in the hearts of the king's enemies. He arraigns the Scribes and Pharisees; he brings them before the bar of his august tribunal; he takes off the mask, and exposes their evil deeds. He who is so pitiful to the worst of repenting sinners, who opens his bosom to receive them, who gives tear for tear, sigh for sigh, has no language strong enough to denounce their hypocrisy. A cheat in religion is the worst of all cheats; nothing is so foul, nothing so base. It is hardly possible to conceive of such a character. There are no relentings for such; they are the worst enemies of God and man. Next to impossible is it to strip them of the covering with which they blind themselves, or to use language harsh enough to pierce hearts more closely encased against reproof than is the skin of the rhinoceros against the sharpest javelin of the hunter. They come nearer in temper to the father of lies thar any other class of reprobates. Hence Jesus, the kind, the tender, the merciful, he whose love and compassion are so unbounded, calls them "the children of the devil." "Ye are," he says, "of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.*"

Does he do anything to mollify their anger; to assuage their furious rage? Nothing further from him than this. He had exhausted every art of persuasion in vain. They themselves acknowledged "the wonderful things that he did;" they could not be blind to this; but instead of yielding they were the more enraged; their animosity took a darker hue; their enmity was bitterer than ever; and they were ready to resort to any methods to suborn witnesses, to bribe the most infamous of men, engaging at the same time to guard them against the consequences of their acts, if they could but find some plausible ground, some false pretense, to bring about the condemnation of Christ, and so end the solemn mockery of a trial.

What helped, among other things, to kindle their rage, and inflame their passions almost to madness, was the parable of the vineyard that was let out to husbandmen, who were indeed none other than Jews. The history of their nation—the vineyard which God had planted—was little else than a recital of continual backsliding from God, with a constant tendency to go after other gods, neglecting or forsaking the worship of God. Who were those servants that he sent, one after another to gather the fruit of the vineyard, but the prophets, whom they maltreated, instead of making a suitable return for the favors they had received, and the distinguished privileges which, above all other nations, they so richly had enjoyed. At length, hoping at the last to receive some return, he sent his beloved son, but instead of receiving him, they no sooner saw him than they conspired, like Joseph's brethren, to put him to death, and ruthlessly carried out their wicked purpose, thereby fulfilling what was written, "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner."*

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* John 8. 44. † Matt. 21. 15.

Well did the rulers and elders understand at whom this was aimed; and also the claim implied by it that Jesus was their Messiah; and that even the chief men among these husbandmen were at that very time actually contriving to put him, the son, to a cruel and unjust death. Thus did Jesus expose their designs, and turn their weapons against themselves. This led to greater ire on their part, and a more resolute determination to put him away at the first favorable opportunity.

And now the chief priests and elders—the senate in council sit—assembled in the palace of Caiaphas, the high priest for this year, deliberating how with the least disturbance from the people, who just now formed a rampart about Christ, they might effect their malign purpose. Caiaphas had been but lately made high priest† by Valerius Gratus, the predecessor of Pontius Pilate), the Roman governor, and presided possibly with Annas, his father-in-law, who had held this high office before him for the space of fifteen years. In all matters respecting Christ they seem to have acted in concert, Caiaphas doubtless glad at such a time to obtain the sanction and advice of one who for so long a period had occupied this position.

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* Luke 20. 17. compared with Psa. 118. 22. † Matt. 26, 3

On one point they were all agreed. They could not deny his wonderful works. This only made the danger greater, and enforced the necessity of speedy and decided action. They said among themselves, "What do we? for this man doeth many miracles."* Further they said, "Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold the world is gone after him."† All these things concurred to give an intensity of interest to this present meeting, and though, even among the members of the council, there were those, who, as we read,‡ secretly inclined to Jesus, they did not dare to avow their inward convictions, and if they had they would have been overpowered by the majority. Even Nicodemus, if he were present on this occasion, was silent, and not a voice was raised in behalf of Christ.

All things were now swiftly tending in one direction, and leading to a fatal issue. At a meeting of the council held some time before, soon after the raising of Lazarus from the dead (which meeting was called in consequence of that event and of the new prestige it gave to the name of Jesus), the members of the council deliberated as to what they should do to stay this ever-rising, overflowing tide of popular favor toward Christ; for a time it had seemed partially checked, but now it was stronger than before. Still the prevalent opinion was that Jesus would now restore the kingdom to Israel; that he would delay no longer, but act, and they were ready to join him as soon as he said the word. Then would follow war with the Romans, with all its attendant evils, and the ruin of the nation: at least so it appeared to the chief priests and rulers: for as yet in their eyes Jesus had given no sufficient guarrantee, or sign, of his actual Messiahship. They looked for some more signal token, evidence, or sign, than he had yet given; something that would suit their low, carnal, selfish views.

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* John 11. 47 † Ibid. 12. 19. ‡ Ibid. ver. 42.

While the council hesitated what to do, dreading to resort to the last extreme measure (for they feared the people), Caiaphas boldly proposed to end the difficulty by putting Christ to death. It was true he had done no wrong; they could find no cause of condemnation in him; but right or wrong he must die. "It is expedient for us," he said, "that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."* Upon this they fully resolved that Christ should die; and from that time until now they had sought to compass their end.

Things had now reached a crisis. Jesus, who had for a brief season withdrawn himself from public notice, had at length of his own accord reappeared openly on the stage, and courting notice, instead of hiding himself from the public eye, was seen daily in the temple teaching the people, and doing mighty works, as his manner was. As the Passover was close at hand, fearing doubtless his great popularity with the multitude who would then be assembled together, they resolved to consummate the dreaded act before the first day of the feast arrived. This would end the long, eventful struggle, and, according to the opinion of Caiaphas, which was doubtless sincere, save the nation from ruin.

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* John 11. 47–50.

There was no time to lose. At this last moment it was that Judas Iscariot, the betrayer, suddenly appeared before the council, and for a sum of money —thirty silver shekels—agreed to deliver Jesus into their hands. He had heard, what had been publicly notified during the brief retirement of Jesus, that any one who knew where Jesus was must report to the council. This had awakened his greed, and he resolved to use his intimate personal connection with Christ, as one of the chosen twelve, for his personal gain. It was money that instigated him ; this one passion, all-absorbing, all-devouring, overpowered every other consideration. Fame, virtue, friendship, all were swept away as by a resistless flood. It was not that he hated Christ ; it was not that all good, that every sentiment of love and truth, had expired in his bosom (his subsequent conduct, to which we will soon refer, shows such was not the case), but one master passion, as a devouring flame, as a consuming fire, like Aaron's rod, swallowed up all the rest. Love, gratitude, every tender and every noble feeling, died as if strangled in the folds of a deadly serpent. Even remorse, the scorpion that was to sting him to death, was for the time forgotten or overlooked. The glittering gold, seen by the eye of imagination, fed the fire in his veins, and burned out all else save the gratification of this one intense, seven times heated, criminal desire.

Strong, all-conquering, as this master passion was, it was not without shamefacedness, a sense of wrong doing, and many an inward pang and nameless fear, that Judas Iscariot presented himself to the council and told them his errand. He must have made himself known to them, so as to satisfy them that he could do what he had undertaken—in a secure, unguarded hour, when few or none would be nigh, to deliver Jesus into their hands. All was arranged beforehand, and Judas was to have the aid of certain officers and men in case resistance should be offered. Perhaps both the time and place were fixed, and Judas, as if he had wiped his hands clean, returned to Jesus and his brother disciples, sin so blinding his eyes and warping his mind, that after all he had seen and known of Jesus, of his all-seeing eye, his omniscience, he imagined what he had done was not known.

Dark as the crime of Judas was in betraying his master, one thing is made abundantly evident, and as far as it goes, must be admitted by way of palliation, he did not think it would lead to the death of Christ. He supposed Jesus, as he had often done before, would free himself out of their hands. He had imagined he could indulge his favorite passion, and yet not actually endanger the person of his master. When he found out his mistake, and that Jesus was condemned to death by the Jewish senate, waiting but for the sanction of the governor

Pontius Pilate, to carry out the decree, and that without the least delay—even on the first day of the sacred feast, and amid all the religious ceremonies by which it was observed—he sought to make reparation by declaring the innocence of him whom he had betrayed, and returning the money, "the price of blood," which he had received. "Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he WAS CONDEMNED" (he had not anticipated this), "repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood."*

It is impossible to mistake this language—it is that of genuine sorrow; and this is confirmed by his returning the money, and declaring that he had betrayed innocent blood. We are not apologizing for his crime—it was of the deepest dye—but it is due to truth to state the facts just as they were. His confession availed him nothing with those who had predetermined the death of Christ. "What is that to us?" they scornfully said, "See thou to that."

The anguish of Judas made no impression on them; and as for the money which he cast down on the floor of the council chamber in the temple, they did not return it to the treasury, but used it to buy the potter's field as a burial place for strangers. Hence, as a kind of memorial of this act (not that the council intended it as such), that field is called in their proper tongue, "Aceldama, that is to say,

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* Matt. 27. 3, 4.

The field of blood."* The whole of this story got abroad, with the reason for this peculiar name; "and it was known to all the dwellers at Jerusalem."†

The chief priests and elders, rejoicing that they had got Christ into their hands, and secured his condemnation, cared little for the instrument by which they had, in the silence and darkness of the night, and in the absence of the multitude, gained their coveted prize. Perhaps at first, when Judas came to them with his greedy eyes, they treated him with some condescension, however they may have despised him in their hearts, and abhorred his treachery. When the end was accomplished, the apparent respect vanished, and regardless of his recantation they left him to go his own way, and reap the full measure of his iniquity.

But, in order to bring out the repentance of Judas, following so closely upon his interview with the chief priests and elders in council assembled, we have anticipated a little the order of events. Judas, as we have seen, having on that eventful night engaged to deliver Christ into their hands, returned to Jesus and the rest as if nothing had happened, companioning with them the same as before. As for the members of the council, after the departure of Judas they congratulated themselves upon such unexpected aid, from so unlikely a source. Who can say? Blinded as they were, intensely hostile to Christ and his pretensions, they may have regarded it as providential, and been the more confirmed on this account in their resolution. They cared not for the motives that impelled one of the twelve to betray his master; they inquired not into these; it was not with them a question of innocence or guilt; all they cared for or wanted was the delivery of Christ into their power. As this was now likely to happen, without disturbance, through the treachery of one of the disciples, they were satisfied, and asked for nothing more. And now the council broke up, each returning to his own home, with the fair prospect that Jesus, whose destruction they had so long sought, would soon be delivered into their hands, tried, condemned and put to death. So closed the most important conference that was ever held.

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* Acts 1. 19. † Ibid. v. 19.

CHAPTER III.

THE WASHING OF THE DISCIPLES' FEET.

BUT one or two days remained ere the great national festival, when Jesus our Passover was to be sacrificed; dying, according to the prediction of Caiaphas, not for the Jewish nation alone, but for the sins of the whole world.* The High Priest knew not, when he uttered those words, that it was by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that the foredoomed death of Jesus would eventuate in "gathering together in one" both Jews and Gentiles, "all the children of God that were scattered abroad."* In the darkest night there are gleams of light, and here in this council, where the death of Christ is resolved on, and the chief spokesman is Caiaphas the High Priest, he is but echoing the voice of ages past, and hastening the fulfillment of prophecies which take into their wide and close embrace the salvation of the whole earth. What a prophecy it was in such a mouth, falling from unannointed lips. How far reaching. How complete in its entirety. The sound is rolling on still, and will never stop—growing louder, clearer, and more distinct, till "all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God."

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* John 11. 52, 53.

In one of the discourses of Jesus delivered in the temple not long before the feast of the Passover, he speaks of his death to certain Greeks—proselytes of the gate, perhaps—who were anxious to see and to converse with him. They came to Philip, saying, "We would see Jesus." And Philip taking Andrew with him, brought them to Christ.† His death, now looming so near—it is of this Jesus speaks : "The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone : but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."‡ In this he refers to his death, and the glorious harvest it would yield ; but while this was an assured thing, such was the heavy load which it involved—no less than the sin, guilt, and misery of the whole world—that Jesus, while as the Son of Man he looked it steadily in the face, all but shrinks, even at this early stage, from drinking of this bitter cup, of the wormwood and the gall with which it was steeped. He says, in view of his approaching death on the cross, "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour." Then as if under the weight and agony of the load of human guilt and misery which he carried on his burdened heart, he cries out in his distress, "Father, glorify thy name."*

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* John 11. 52. † Ibid 12. 20, 22. ‡ Ibid. vers. 23, 24.

Then an answer came, the heavens were parted; God bowed the heavens and came down; his voice was heard (those standing by heard it, some taking it for thunder, others saying it was the voice of an angel), "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again."† Encouraged (we speak after the manner of men) by this voice from heaven, the testimony of the Godhead, Jesus dilates still further upon his death, the world's anchor and hope; and viewing the overthrow of Satan and the destruction of death and hell as one of the consequences flowing from his death, he says, "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."‡ First Satan, "the prince of this world," so designated by Christ, is, in virtue of the death of our Lord and Saviour, to lose his hold of the kingdoms of this world (when Satan affirmed that they were his, our Lord did not deny his claim), to have them pass into the hands of one mightier than he. And then would follow the universal diffusion and reception of the kingdom of Christ. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Here, in the cleft of the rock, the wounded side of Jesus, whence poured forth, slowly oozing out, "both water and blood," and the bones of his body unbroken, here is "the hiding of his power."* Here, as from an unassailable high tower and strong fortress, "went forth his arrows, and the shining of his glittering spear." From this vantage ground did Christ the Lord "march through the land in indignation, and thresh the heathen in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah."

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* John 12. 23, 24. † Ibid. ver. 28. ‡ Ibid. vers. 31, 32,

At the wondrous spectacle of the world brought to bow through the suffering of death to the mild sceptre of Christ, "The sun and moon stood still in their habitation; the mountains saw thee, and they trembled; the overflowing of the water passed by; the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high."† All nature was moved, and in sympathy with the amazing sight of one "hanging on a tree," bearing the curse for us, and lifting his languid eye toward us, to call forth a love for him stronger than death; and which like water from the flinty rock could be produced by no less a sacrifice than the death of Christ upon the accursed tree.

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* Hab. 3. 4. † Ibid. vers. 10, 11, 13.

The last two or three days of the human life of Jesus Christ were fast passing away; they would soon be ended, and the curtain fall upon the tragic scene. The moments were golden moments; every grain of sand in the hour-glass was precious, sparkling with life, big with the fate of the world. Never were there such moments since the world began, and never will there be again.

It is impossible to estimate them too highly, or weigh their infinite value. It is to the God-Man, Christ Jesus the Lord, they refer, and to whom they belong. To none other. They cluster as diamonds around his sacred head; they attach themselves to his person, office, and dignity.

Every evening, as the day drew to a close, Jesus left the city with his disciples, and lodged in Bethany; early in the morning, amid the scent of the flowers of spring and the glad singing of birds, he returned to the city and temple. The day was spent mostly in the temple, teaching the people. Part of one of these days was passed on Mount Olivet, speaking to his disciples of his second coming and of the end of the world. The two topics could not be disjoined. The second coming of Christ and the end of the world, with "the restitution of all things," would be cotemporaneous. In the temple, the end so near, his speech referred mainly, under the guise of parables, to his present departure from the world, and his sure return at some period in the distant future. But as the time for his return in great glory and power to our world was uncertain, all were exhorted to be on the watcn, and ever on their guard; like servants who instead of saying, "My lord delayeth his coming," are always on the look out, knowing that "in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh."* The parable of the ten virgins, and that of the "man traveling in a far country," both fall under this general head; and serve as specimens of the teaching of Jesus to the Jews in the temple during these last days. The sky grows dark—the thunders begin to roll—the lightnings to flash, as the end draws near, and the mission of Jesus to our world is about to close in death.

But the evenings in Bethany, how dear must they have been. How were they spent? Those hours of solitude, when removed from the ever surging crowd that beset his steps as soon as he appeared in the city and temple. The triumphal entry into the city was not yet forgotten—the applause of that notable day—and the expectation remained that Jesus would yet show himself to be their present temporal king and ruler, and thus give THE SIGN, so often asked for, for which the Jews waited, and which most of them even to the last moment, anxiously expected. In contrast with this day-scene, the noise of the busy crowd, the hum of men, the sound of many voices, the crowd in the temple, the preparation for the Passover, how calm and tranquil must have been the hours, the few fleeting hours yet remaining, in the village of Bethany amid friends so loving and loved. The new moon having just passed, pale Cynthia shone with her loving look upon bush, and floweret, and tree, and spangled grass; but soon declining, with her horn not yet full, and sinking softly and slowly in the west behind the chain of mountains that surround Jerusalem on that side as a high wall of defense. Of what did they converse? Most likely of what was so soon to come: but enigmatically, as in the temple in the day time; for the veil on their minds could not be removed till that of the temple was rent in twain, and the "great mystery of godliness" finally and fully resolved.

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* Matt. 24. 44.

At length had come the day of preparation for the Passover, when the Paschal lamb was to be slain by the priest in the outer court of the temple, and made ready for the supper at eventide; when the guest chamber was to be prepared, all leaven to be removed, and every nook, corner and crevice, to be searched with lighted candles. Bethany had been visited for the last time; that road "traversed so oft" during the three years now past, would be retrodden no more by those "blessed feet which for our advantage would soon be nailed to the bitter cross." The day had come, smilingly breaking upon our world, calm, soft, peaceful, with its attendant sweet moring air of spring time, and blue sky—the day of all others, but the next which was to follow—pregnant with an event of the greatest moment to the whole human race. The sun arose and pursued his daily course as usual; nature was gay and blithe; the fruits of the earth were slowly ripening for the sickle and the garner in the open field; and the new grass, and the tender vine with its delicate odor, were seen springing upon every side, and no knell was heard giving token of the dolorous hour of the crucifixion so close at hand. The warning note was in Jesus' voice, nowhere else, unless we enter the council chamber, and bring to light the dark designs, the secret plottings of the High Priest and rulers of the Jews against the Lord's Anointed. As the time approached to seize Jesus they became increasingly solicitous, and perhaps feared lest Judas might fail to redeem his pledge.

The first thing that was done on the morning of the day of preparation for the feast was to send Peter and John (these two favored disciples) in advance of the rest to procure a suitable place for the supper. This was done possibly in the morning ere Jesus with the other disciples left Bethany. Just as Jesus said, the two disciples, at the entering in the city, met a man with a pitcher of water in his hand; following him, according to the directions they had received, they accosted him as he was about entering his house, saying, "The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at thy house with my disciples."*

A word was sufficient. By divine premonition the goodman of the house had already furnished a large upper room for this purpose, and all that was required of the disciples was to procure a lamb without spot or blemish, have him slain by the priest in the course of the day, and made ready for the evening, when Jesus and his disciples would partake of the same, according to the immemorial practice of the Jews.

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* Matt. 26. 18.

At six o'clock of the evening of that day, the beginning of the Passover, Jesus and his disciples, including Judas Iscariot, assembled in the guest chamber to partake of the solemn feast; thousands of their countrymen, in companies of ten or more, partaking of it at the same time. Households met together to celebrate it, consisting of husbands, wives, children, and servants; distinctions forgotten, they sat together at one common table; and so partook as a united family of the typical lamb. Perhaps there was not a house in the city, however humble, that was not lighted up and a board spread and provided with guests.

Out of every land came Jews by descent, though in a certain sense strangers, because not born in Judea, to take part in the great national festival. Acknowledging thus the God of their fathers, they set to their seal the wonderful deliverance which it commemorated; deliverance from their long and hard bondage in the land of Egypt; in the same manner as we commemorate the anniversary of the day of the declaration of our independence from foreign rule.

The shades of evening gather around; the candles are lighted and the board spread. Beside the roasted lamb, placed whole upon the table, there was spread upon it unleavened bread, or bread "free from the slightest fermentation," a plate of bitter salad, and a dish of thick sauce, composed of various fruits and pleasant to the taste—a savory dish. Seated at the head of the table, with his disciples occupying severally their appointed places, our gracious Lord says: "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof until it be fulfilled, in the kingdom of God."*

"Before I suffer." This was the thought uppermost in the mind of our Saviour; but the words, so significant, fell on leaden ears. They were, indeed, on this subject, dull of hearing. As often as our Saviour had spoken of his death, and that with the utmost particularity, no impression had been made on their minds; over and over again he spoke, detailing all the circumstances, but in vain. His death was so remote from their minds, so little had they conceived of a suffering Messiah, that he might as well have spoken to the winds. So it was with all their countrymen; when, as we have seen, not long before Jesus had said he was about to be "lifted up," "thereby signifying what death he should die," "the people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth forever: and how sayest thou, The Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?"†

This was the dark enigma to be solved; this was the mystery to be unfolded. Jesus a triumphant Saviour; Jesus, the Son of David, seated on the throne of his father David; Jesus victorious over every foe; Jesus "abiding forever;" his sun never going down, his kingdom perpetual as the sun and the moon in the heavens, and of universal extent; all nations, kings, and kingdoms subjected unto the Jewish rule; this was what was before their eyes as a mental phantasmagoria, and blinded them to everything else. They did not even "see men as trees walking." The disciples were also stone blind, and were not in the least degree undeceived, until his words were actually fulfilled, and "the Son of Man was betrayed into the hands of sinners." So great was their misconception, that even this very night, amid the solemnities of the feast, they disputed among themselves "which of them should be accounted greatest,"* alluding undoubtedly to the long expected, coming kingdom, now, as they thought, just at hand, of their Lord and Master.

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* Luke 22. 15, 16. † John 12. 34.

This, said Jesus—gently rebuking them—was the way of the world; men were striving for superiority over their fellows; and in proportion as they succeeded in obtaining the mastery, they were held in admiration among men; "but," said our Lord, "ye shall not be so; but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."† Then he cites his own example, the last proof of which was soon to be shown in his "obedience unto death, even the death of the cross." To give point to what he had just said, he adds, "For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth."‡ The disciples, to some extent, felt the force of this rebuke, so kindly given, but not until the Holy Ghost, the promise of the Father, was sent down from heaven, (Jesus sustaining both relations—the

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* Luke 23. 24. † Ibid. ver. 26. ‡ Ibid. ver. 27.

Son and the Father),[*] could these words be fully comprehended; or perhaps the spirit and practice of their great model be successfully imitated.

According to the Jewish custom of celebrating, the eating of unleavened bread formed the third course; and two cups of wine had already been drunk. At this point Jesus took the bread, and "gave thanks, and broke it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body, which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me." At the close of the supper, just before rising from the table, Jesus took for the fourth time the cup in his hands and said, "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."[†]

When we connect these words with those spoken by Jesus in the Synagogue at Capernaum, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you,"[‡] how can we fail to attach to them an inconceivable weight. A strange mist hung over their delivery, both when uttered in the Synagogue, and now at the close of the supper; but ere long, by the coming of the Holy Ghost, it would be lifted up and dispersed; and the atoning sacrifice be seen in its true light. Shadows would flee away—types and ceremonies be abrogated; and the full purport of the blood of bulls and goats* shed for the remission of sins be felt and understood, and the government of God be abundantly vindicated.

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[*] Note.—On one occasion Jesus said to the Jews, corroborating in the strongest manner the above statement, "He that seeth me, seeth Him that sent me." John 12. 45.

[†] Luke 22. 19, 20. Another rendering of this passage is, "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many." Mark 14. 23. To this is added by Matt. 26. 28. "for the remission of sins."

[‡] John 6. 53.

Who are these that are seated around the table of the Lord? The scene has been painted. Leonardo da Vinci has expended upon it his genius; some faint traces of the picture in its original form are preserved to us still. He has sought to delineate their countenances as they were formed in his own mind. But they were pictures, efforts of fancy, not true likenesses, real representations of living men. Still we regard them with fondness, and gaze on them with veneration. Tradition, or fact, and fancy, tell us that he reserved the Saviour to the last; that he hardly dared attempt to draw this figure, and was ready to give up in despair; at the last moment a flash like an illumination fell upon him; and the figure of Christ was conceived and drawn in a single night. But whatever fancy may have pictured, or skill executed, the scene itself is real, and has passed into the history of the world. It can never again be separated from it; and what was foretold then soon came to pass; that blood is flowing still, and will continue to flow, till it has washed clean out the last trace of sin and misery from our guilty world.

The names of the twelve, seated at the table in this upper room, were as follows: Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James the son of Alpheus, Lebbeus (Jude),* Simon the Canaanite, and last of all, Judas Iscariot. These twelve Jesus sent forth in the earlier part of his ministry, about the same time perhaps that he delivered the sermon on a mountain in the vicinity of Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee. From Capernaum they set out, two and two, to preach; their line marked out; going from village to village as directed; and everywhere performing cures;—healing the sick, casting out devils, with the same power as their Master. Here the Godhead of Christ appears; he repeats himself; and his disciples are endowed with supernatural gifts. Who could confer such gifts of healing, in the absence of all meretricious tricks, but the great God? As they went forth on their untried mission—they had pretended to nothing of this before—they were plain but honest men, simple, modest (as all their acts show), Jesus "gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease."† What a commission was this! After awhile they returned, having fully tested the power which was given them, and found all that Jesus said amply verified in their own experience. Ever since they had continued with their Lord "in his temptations," and now they are seated with him for the last time around the supper table. They reclined on seats, after the Roman fashion adopted by the later Jews; John, the disciple "whom Jesus loved," sitting next to him, "leaning on his bosom."‡ We cannot but think the scene was sad and solemn ; for though as yet none of them contemplated the death of Christ, yet the discourse of Jesus was so different from that at former festivals, while a heavier oppression rested on him, that it is fair to suppose that the sorrow he felt communicated itself to the rest. Then there was Judas present, and though none understood the words of Jesus respecting him, and had not the slightest suspicion of the great crime he was about to commit, yet there was that in the words and aspect of Jesus when the name of Judas was mentioned, and reference made to his betrayal of his Master, that gave more or less uneasiness to the rest, and deepened the gloom that pervaded their minds during the whole of the last supper.

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* Heb. 10. 4.

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* Doddridge's Expositor. † Matt, 10. 1. ‡ John 13. 23.

Among other expressions that were used, was this, "that the Scripture might be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me."* He further said, while solemn silence pervaded the table, and every heart was agitated, and deep concern depicted on their countenances—all save one whose head was bent and whose cheeks were blanched with terror—"Truly the Son of Man goeth, as it was determined : but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed."† Afterward, ere the evening closed, referring to the act of Judas, and also to the absolute necessity of his own death, he said, "This that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors : for the things concerning me have an end."‡

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* John 13. 18, Psa. 41. 9. † Luke 22. 22.

‡ Luke 23. 37 : also Isa. 53. 12.

What was written concerning his death, by the prophet Isaiah, Jesus applies to himself, this in the most direct manner; and the fact that he was crucified between two thieves, as if like them he was a criminal, justly condemned to death, bears out the truth of his words. How vain the attempt of certain modern commentators to give a different interpretation to the language of the prophet, and force it in spite of what our Lord himself has so expressly said, and on so solemn and momentous an occasion, into a wholly different channel. How unlike these words of Jesus, as he speaks of his death, to those of Socrates, as recorded by the graceful pen of Xenophon. No such utterances does he give in his prison, while he waits for the going down of the sun when his career will be finished. He talks of the soul, of its immortality, it is true, but ah, how faint the revealings of this truest man of all antiquity, this wise and truly good man, to the plain declarations of Jesus Christ! As to a future existence, how could there be any doubt, when he spoke, who, "coming down from heaven," did but tell "of that he knew, and testify that he had seen."*

But the night, the eventful night, is passing away, and much yet remains to be done. The supper over, the different courses, and the washings, ended, Jesus prepares himself to wash his disciples' feet, thereby giving them an example that they "also ought to wash one another's feet."† At three different times, during the Paschal feast, each one, according to the Jewish custom, had washed his hands; but now our Saviour in accordance with the great lesson of humility which his assumption of our nature teaches to all men, however high their aspirations, or fancied dignity, proceeds to do one of the most menial of offices. Is there any lowering of dignity here? None whatever. Grace and beauty attend this act; while it brings down in the dust every "high thought that exalts itself against God; every vain imagination indulged by man "dressed in brief authority;" and imagining himself to be "something," when in fact he is "nothing."

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* John 3. 11. † Ibid. 13. 14.

Laying aside his outer (upper) garment, which would have been in the way, Jesus "poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded."* Nothing was said while one and another submitted to this office, until our Lord came to Peter, who refused to have it done. Peter felt at this time as he did after the miracle of the fishes, when, conscious that he was in the presence of one who "came from God," he said in the depth of his humiliation, overwhelmed at the wondrous sight, "falling down at Jesus' knees," "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."† The same feeling actuates him now. He thought it an act of too great condescension on the part of their Lord and Master, and his whole soul revolted at it; but when he found that he would be excluded from the society of Jesus unless his feet were washed with the rest, he said, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head."‡ In the ardor of his generous soul, he went from one extreme to another; for his whole life was bound up in his love of Christ. So Jesus went from one to another of his disciples on this the last night of his life, washing their feet, and wiping them with a towel, till all was completed. Then he girded himself anew, put on his upper garment, and prepared himself for what was to follow; the disciples, notwithstanding all the warnings they had received, not for a moment perhaps thinking the end was so near; though they felt sorrow at certain intimations obscurely given, that they might lose his society, and be left without his all-sustaining presence.

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* John 13. 5. † Luke 5. 8. ‡ John 13. 4.

Before, however, they broke up, Jesus shows his love to Peter, and perhaps his appreciation of the motive which led him to refuse having his feet washed, by warning him of the trial to which he would soon be exposed, and preparing him to guard against it. With all Peter's faults, arising at least in part from his natural temperament, Jesus loved him with a peculiar love. He "knew what was in man," and was ready to sympathize with the erring one, knowing the ardor of his love, and the depth of his convictions. Jesus knew full well that Peter and the rest, even the loving John, would this very night, startled by his capture (he who had hitherto always escaped), and dismayed by the presence of the soldiers, all leave him, in their fear fleeing for their lives. But Peter declared though all left he would not—he would die first. The warning of his Master was not heeded, that he would fail in the hour of trial; for of nothing at the time did Peter feel more confident than that it was impossible for him to deny his Master. Did Jesus love him any the less for his failure? Though grieved to the heart, more for Peter's sake than his own, he made every allowance for the effects of sudden surprise and great fear; and giving him one look, recalled to his memory what he had foretold. That single glance was sufficient; in answer to prayer, the prayer of Jesus for him, his faith, which had failed temporarily, returned, and he repented nearly as soon as he had sinned.

There was seated at the table, in that little company whose feet Jesus washed, one whose heart was dark as night, hard as the nether millstone. He could not be diverted from his infamous purpose; but could it be otherwise that he suffered all the agony of guilt? His face assumed the appearance of innocence; he did not betray his inward agitation, yet conscious of his guilt, of his treachery that would soon be disclosed, did he not on this night suffer a thousand deaths?

Having once taken the downward track, the betrayer could not stop in his swift descent; conscience knocked in vain at the door of his heart, and leaving the room he hastened to the chief priests, scribes and rulers, to consummate his wickedness by acting as a guide to the place where, about a certain hour, he would be sure to find Jesus. Judas having left, Christ's bosom was less oppressed, and perhaps an hour or more was spent in speaking his last words; promising his disciples the "Comforter,"* assuring them of his love, and that though they might be separated for a time, he would see them again, and "their hearts would rejoice, and their joy no man would take from them."*

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* John 16. 7.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE.

THE night grows darker; the way narrower. "The Son of Man goeth as it is written of him." "The things concerning me," said our blessed Lord, "have an end." There was no turning on this road; it led straight from the cradle to the cross; from the manger to the tomb. The road had been marked out long before by patriarchs and prophets. Kings had foreseen it, and had spoken of it in terms that could apply to no earthly monarch. As one of the highways leading out of Rome was lined on either side with monuments of the illustrious dead, so, all along the pathway Jesus trod, there were mementoes to remind Him who "was alone, and of the people there was none with him," that every step he took brought him nearer, and still nearer, to the accursed tree, on which hanging suspended he would bear away "the sin of the world."

And now the last night that, so to speak, he would see on earth, had arrived; the preliminaries were all over, and the desire of his heart gratified in partaking for the last time with his disciples of the Paschal supper. When we remember what in the case of Jesus "the suffering of death" implied, how unlike any and all other deaths combined, how "his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree,"* need we wonder at the scene in the garden which was preparatory to this most awful event? There is no mystery here, when we remember "that the "agony and bloody sweat" were produced by the cup he was about to drink, the death he was about to die, not simply dying by a painful death; far, far from this: but sacrificial in its character, fulfilling all types and shadows; magnifying the law and making it honorable; sheathing the sword of justice, as the angel sheathed it on the hill Moriah, as the pestilence raged, at the voice of prayer and the cry of intercession, and opening the way for mercy to rejoice over judgment. It is impossible to conceive of the load Jesus bore; John, the forerunner of Christ, had some faint conception of it when he pointed to Christ and said, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

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* John, chaps. 14, 15, 16.

It is in view of the accumulated guilt of the world, which was about to be laid upon him as he would hang upon the tree—the dreadful, and all but insupportable agony of that hour—that we must look for the true solution of the distress and anguish through which Jesus passed in the garden. Knowing the time had arrived for him to die—to lay down his life for the sins of the whole world—

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* 1 Pet. 2. 24.

he seeks the retirement of Gethsemane to prepare himself by a brief hour of prayer for what he was so soon to undergo. The struggle was great; it was awful; the whole scene of the cross was painted to eye; his human nature shrank at the sight; for a moment the Godhead is, or rather seems, obscured; he staggers prospectively under the load, until aided by angels he rises victorious, and says, "not my will but thine be done."

Apart from what Jesus underwent in the garden, prospectively in view of his death, how could we tell what he endured on the cross? Save one bitter, heart-rending cry, as he bears the dreadful load (for the iniquity of us all was laid upon him, and by his stripes we are healed), "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," we would know but little of what Jesus went through in dying on the cross.

The darkness was impenetrable; never before was such darkness: for a time—we speak of the human in Christ—there was no ray of hope; all of solace and hope were gone; every tie was sundered; the future was a blank; nothing left but misery and despair. It was the hour of the power of darkness; it was as if all were lost; his work a failure; as if he had lost his hold of God. His soul sunk within him, and nothing could exceed the sense of the inconceivable loss of God. To some such temporary despairing sense that all was lost and over, and the soul for that solitary moment left without any hold of God, we must attribute the otherwise inexplicable cry of Jesus on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me."

The garden prepares us for this; that time of strong crying and tears; of groanings which could not be uttered; when even Jesus feared to enter upon the lonesome road; to tread the wine-press alone; to drink the cup. But strength and consolation soon came; at the end of the hour the spirit was victor over the flesh, and Jesus, nerved by strength divine, prepares for the last, dreadful conflict. Armed with panoply divine, with more than Ithuriel's spear, with the sword of the Spirit, Jesus enters with slow and measured steps, with his soul firm and collected, into the dread arena to fight for the life of the world.

He awoke his disciples, for the night was already far spent, and they were overpowered with sleep, when the sound of approaching footsteps, and the glimmer of lamps, and the bright shining of lighted torches, seen through the trees and the darkness, notified him of the band of men, with their officers, sent for his apprehension. With stealthy steps, with a trembling heart, Judas, "which was guide to them that took Jesus,"* coming straight up to Christ saluted him with a kiss. Instead of avoiding his captors, Jesus "went forth" to meet them, saying, "Whom seek ye?" They answering, replied, "Jesus of Nazareth." When in reply Jesus said, "I am he," straightway all power left them—their swords and staves fell useless by their sides—and instead of executing their orders, they instantly "went backward and fell to the ground."† Here was a door of escape; but did Jesus avail himself of it? The power of the Godhead in Christ laid them low ; but after awhile they recovered from the blow, and Jesus, "the Lord of life and glory," allowed himself to be bound, and to be led before the High Priest and Jewish council assembled together at that hour of the night waiting for him.

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* Acts 1. 16. † John 18. 6.

There is one thing connected with the events of this night, which shows how the disciples, as well as the Jews generally, held fast to the idea of a temporal king in their Messiah ; and that force would be used to place him on the throne. During the progress of the supper, in the earlier part of that same evening, from certain intimations given, the disciples knowing that the Sanhedrin threatened Jesus with death, made reference to the weapons which they had brought with them, doubtless for the protection of their Master, "And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough."* And now, laboring under the same mistake, Peter having seen so many proofs of the power of his Master, and never once doubting but that it would be exerted now for his own deliverance out of the hands of his enemies, all powerful as they were, drew his sword, and boldly advancing, "smote Malchus the High Priest's servant, and cut off the right ear."†

Peter of course expected that this blow would be followed by some display of supernatural power : but when he found that this was not the case, that Jesus was actually made prisoner, his courage fled ; he thought himself mistaken in Christ—gave up for the moment all for lost—and sought only his own personal safety.

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* Luke 22. 38 † John 18. 10.

So with the rest of the disciples. "Then all the disciples forsook him and fled."* Thus was fulfilled what Jesus had said that night, just at the close of supper: "All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad."†

We see from this how strong was the expectation of the twelve, and of the disciples, even to the very last moment, that Jesus would "redeem Israel,"‡ and that through all the scenes of this eventful night this thought, this strong, undeviating trust of the immediate restoration of the kingdom of Israel through the Messiah, was uppermost in their minds, to the exclusion of everything else. It was when these hopes were so suddenly dashed to the ground by the seizure of their Master—that remembering the fate of Theudas, "who boasted himself to be somebody," that is the Messiah, and "Judas of Gallilee, in the days of the taxing," who, acting the same part, "drew away much people after him," and miserably perished, while his followers fell away—the disciples losing their self-possession, and overcome with fear, supposed for a little season that their Master was mistaken, and that they had built their hopes, after all they had seen, known, and done, upon a false foundation. For a moment the world came in like a flood; their little all had been forsaken for Christ, and though their love, which was both sincere and deep, had prompted all they did, yet was it not unmingled with more or less selfishness, and they were not prepared to see their dream fade away without painfully recalling the sacrifices they had made, and all in vain. It was an hour of hurry, of surprise, of fear, doubt, and disappointment. They lost courage, hope, and fell into a state of utter despair. Jesus, foreseeing all this, had warned them of it. Even in the garden, after his great agony, he had sought to put them on their guard, to prepare them for this onslaught, and perhaps it was this, in some measure, which, after the surprise was over, and recollection came to their aid, enabled them before long to rally, and caused at least Peter and John to follow their Master to the "palace of the High Priest," to witness what would befall him there.

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* Matt. 26. 56. † Matt, 26. 31. compared with Zech. 13. 7.

‡ Luke 24. 21.

John had access to the palace, and prevailed with the maid who kept the door to admit Peter also. But a little while before, these two, with the rest, were fleeing as if for their lives, no one, however, pursuing them. Now they, at least, of the number, have partially recovered from their fright, and like timid deer hiding in a covert, they watch the close of the extraordinary spectacle.

Sorrowful, silent, full of foreboding, they stood in the hall of the palace of Caiaphas the High Priest, John standing nearer the council-board than Peter. The latter took his place in the center of the great hall, among the servants and inferior officers of the

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* John 18. 15.

household, "who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold;"* and when the rest sat down around the brazier, Peter sat down also, warming himself, and acting as if he were an indifferent spectator, a mere looker-on, urged by curiosity. He was the more impelled to do this, to act as if he were a stranger to Jesus, because the maid who kept the door thought she recognized him, and, as he entered, said, "Art not thou also one of this man's disciples?"† Peter, startled by the sudden question, and forgetting the warning of his Master, abruptly, and perhaps harshly, answered, "I am not."

It was a positive denial. He who loved so much, and who had declared that if all the world forsook Jesus he would not. He, recreant to Christ?—no never! He turn his back upon the Saviour, and be found among those who believed not in his name—how could this be so? At the time Peter really thought it an impossibility. Yet as he entered the door of the great hall of the palace of Caiaphas, where Jesus was on trial, standing alone, upon the bare surmise made by the portress of the door, he denies positively that he is one of his disciples.—This was his first denial; and his way from this was swiftly downward.

While Peter and the rest were seated around the fire of coals, burning in the brazen pan, at the further extremity of the hall a different scene was passing. Jesus stood as a criminal, in the eye of the Jewish law, before Caiaphas and the assembled senate. In reply to a question of the High Priest concerning his disciples and his doctrine, Jesus answered in such a way that one of the officers of the court, thinking it derogatory to the High Priest, "struck him with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the High Priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?"*

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* John 18. 18. † Ibid ver. 17.

The trial—if that can be called a trial where a court meets to condemn irrespective of evidence, or has manufactured the evidence in advance—now fairly commenced. Witnesses were produced to testify against Christ, but their testimony, though prepared beforehand, and made upon oath, was so contradictory, as well as irrelevant, that it was worthless. Some time was taken up in the examination of these false witnesses: at length two were found who said that they heard Jesus say, "Destroy the temple of God, and I will build it in three days."† But even on this point "their witnesses did not agree together,"‡ and a harsh and forced construction must be put on these words to make them blasphemous, and so bring them within the purview of their law.

During all this time Jesus had maintained the most perfect silence. "He opened not his mouth."§ He did not attempt to contradict or refute their testimony. They themselves, his judges, knew it to be false—why should he expose its falsity? Even when appealed to by the High Priest to affirm or deny "what the witnesses testified," Jesus still

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* John 18. 19-23. † Matt. 26. 61. ‡ Mark 14. 59.

§ Isa. 53. 7.

"held his peace and answered nothing."[*] How long, exactly, this silence continued, we know not, but it was probably of some duration, as the judges in the case were solicitous to obtain something in the nature of confirmatory proof, and as far as possible set themselves right with the people. Beside their verdict must have the sanction of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, ere they could compass the death of Christ, and they wished to go before him with clean hands, and show good cause why Pilate should carry out their verdict by the summary execution of one who, according to their representation, called himself the "King of the Jews."

Impatient of the profound silence under false accusation which Jesus hitherto had observed, struck, perhaps awed, with the dignity of his demeanor, his serene composure, the ineffable sweetness that stole insensibly, as light fleecy clouds over the face of the calm blue sky of a moonlight night, over that radiant countenance, feeling, it may be, the silent presence of one whose wonderful works none could deny, to whatever mysterious cause they might be ascribed, Caiaphas broke through the long and painful restraint, growing still more so with every passing moment, and made this most solemn appeal to Christ: "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God?"[†] The answer to this was, "Thou hast said:"[‡] or as another evangelist has it (the purport of both the same), "I am."[§]

[*] Mark 14. 60.
[†] Matt. 26. 63.
[‡] Ibid. ver. 64.
[§] Mark 14. 62.

Here we have the direct avowal of Jesus that he is the Son of God: "Thou hast said:" or to use the language of Luke, "Ye say that I am."* If it should be said that this language is equivocal, and leaves the question still in doubt, what immediately follows answers all questions, and removes all doubts, as to the testimony of Jesus concerning himself; concerning his mission, office, and Messiahship: "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."† The Jews understood well what this meant; what his answer implied, if it did not directly affirm. They needed nothing else—no other proof of his guilt. This avowal, falling from his own lips in the presence of the council, was sufficient in the absence of all other testimony to condemn him to death. So horrified was the High Priest at what he deemed so execrable and impious that he "rent his clothes," crying out, "He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold now ye have heard his blasphemy."‡

It is possible that the High Priest was sincere in what he said, as nothing was so sacred to a Jew as the unity of the Godhead, and that "beside God there was none other." The foundation on which rested the law given from Mount Sinai was, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." "I am the Lord thy God."§ Yet here was one arraigned before the most august tribunal of his nation, and

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* Luke 22. 70. † Matt. 26. 64. ‡ Ibid. ver. 15.

§ Exod. 20. 3. Deut. 5. 6.

"found in fashion as a man," claiming to be "equal with God;" for so the Jews (as we have already seen), construed the declaration of Jesus that he was "the Son of God." But while the High Priest was sincere in this, and sentence of death was passed on this ground, all present concurring therein, when they came before Pilate they urged his condemnation solely for political reasons, as if he was an enemy to the Roman government, leading the nation astray, refusing to pay tribute, "saying that he himself is Christ, a King."* All these charges they knew to be false; yet as blasphemy was a crime unknown to the Roman code, and the charge wholly alien to the spirit of polytheism, out of pure malice and hatred to Christ, they accuse him falsely and so commit a most grievous sin.

And now Jesus stood condemned to death by the unanimous voice of the council. The night being far advanced, Caiaphas, with the members of the council, left the hall for a brief season, retiring probably to the interior of the palace for rest and refreshment after that long and exciting sitting of the council. It is not likely they gave sleep to their eyes the remainder of that eventful night; for as soon as the day began to break, and the first faint glimmering of light was seen, they returned to the hall; and before the news spread abroad, they conducted Jesus to the house of the governor, the splendid palace which was built and formerly occupied by Herod the Great. It was situated on the hill of Zion.

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* Luke 23. 2.

It was after the High Priest, the scribes and the elders had retired from the hall, that Jesus was subjected to the gibes, the raillery, and even the blows of those "that held" him. As a criminal condemned to death, left standing alone in their midst, without protection, they assailed him as they would a dog in the streets. Among other insults heaped upon him, as if in mockery of his claims, they first blindfold him, and then strike him "on the face, saying, Prophesy who is it that smote thee?"* They "spit in his face,"† "and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands."‡ "And many other things blasphemously spake they against him."§

The hours slowly waned away as Jesus meekly bore this injurious treatment. His look was a look of love. No feeling of anger, no cry for revenge, arose in that unperturbed bosom. His prayer in the garden—the consolation there vouchsafed—the strength then and there imparted—had prepared him for all this, and much more. What could now disturb his serenity! The agony in the garden is over; for he was "heard in that he feared;" speaking of Jesus as a man. Pity was all he felt—pity for those who were thus maltreating him.

While his Master was undergoing this shameful treatment, Peter, forgetful of his fealty, his faith in Christ having failed him (though but for a time; in answer to Jesus' prayer it soon returned, flowing back stronger than ever), cowering through fear, forgetful of all the past, of his strong profession of unswerving love, and readiness to die for Christ, a second time denied any knowledge of Christ ; and at last when again persistently charged as belonging to the number of his disciples, not content with a simple denial, " he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom you speak."*

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* Luke 22. 64. † Matt. 26. 67. ‡ Mark 14. 65.

§ Luke 22. 65.

As he said this the cock crew the second time ; Jesus turned upon him a soft, pitying look—a glance of love—Peter recalled his words—his heart smote him with his ingratitude and unfaithfulness, and he "went out and wept bitterly."†

CHAPTER V.

THE CRUCIFIXION.

Amid what has just passed, "the agony and bloody sweat"—the betrayal with a kiss—the seizure of Christ in the dark and solemn night—the the somber silence of the midnight hour—the twinkling of the stars—the setting of the moon, slowly sinking behind the western hills, its pale rays shining askant upon the blue wave of the distant sea—amid the scene in the great hall of the palace of Caiaphas the High Priest—nothing rises to our view so grandly, towering upward in the sky, far upward above the cerulean dome (as if that were its native element), as the testimony of Jesus concerning himself as the Son of God. Does he evade the appeal? Does he refuse to answer the pointed interrogatory of the High Priest? Is there any hesitation? Does he come down from his high place? Nay, he asserts his Messiahship, not more positively than he had done before, but with greater emphasis, and with a deeper coloring, with richer drapery of language than in the past. All the solemnities of eternity are brought to bear upon his explicit avowal. Is he not the Son of God, or, as one of the writers puts it, "the Son of the Blessed?"* Who will deny his just claim, in opposition to his own unqualified assertion, and this in the face of life and death.

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* Matt. 26. 71. Mark 14. 71. Luke in his account just says, "Man, I know not what thou sayest," omitting the swearing and cursing.

† Luke 22. 62.

What had Jesus to gain—a man so pure, so dead to the empty honors of a fleeting world—by dying with a lie in his mouth? Was he self-imposed upon—a visionary, deluded by his own vain dreams? His whole life tells the contrary, and all the facts in his case, as recorded, show the most perfect soundness of mind, and clearness of judgment: while the church that he left behind, the house that he built, the foundation that he laid, show the marks of the same unerring hand that traced out in the heavens the course of the stars, made the sun and the moon to stand still in their habitation, and caused whatever is to be. Do the heavenly luminaries grow dim with time? Does the earth wax old, and show signs of decay? And the religion of Jesus, his pure, sweet, undefiled religion, has it lost any of its control over the human soul? Is it any the less efficacious in the hour of trial, in the day of trouble, than when it first began its glorious course, and, like the sun, was newly risen on the earth,—its first home—its earliest gleaming, the land of Judea.

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* Mark 14. 61.

"I am," said Jesus, "the Son of God;" and you will hereafter see me "sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

Of his own most solemn testimony, delivered at such a time, under such circumstances, Jesus thus speaks: "Though I bear record of myself, my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I came, and whither I go."* He further adds: "It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me."† But what is this testimony, as deducible from the express declaration of Jesus Christ our Lord? It is two-fold in its nature, and the two parts can no more be separated than the living child can be divided—as Solomon in his wisdom directed to test the real mother. The soul in its agony cries out against this, as did the mother when in her anguish she exclaimed, "Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it."‡

It is not simply that Jesus is "the Son of God," or as it is also expressed, "the Son of the Blessed," but he tells us at the same time, "If ye had known me ye should have known my Father also."*

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* John 8. 14. † Ibid. ver. 17, 18-22. ‡ 1 Kings 3. 26.

The mystery of "God in Christ," Jesus as "one and the same with the Father," not as in essence in any wise distinguished from him, is thus spoken of in answer to Philip: "Lord," said Philip, "show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." "Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father, and how sayest thou, Shew us the Father? If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him."†

Thus in Christ the whole Deity is shown, and God is found dwelling among men here on our earth clothed in human form. It is this which imparts such inexpressible grandeur to the scene in the hall of the High Priest as Jesus asserts his Godhead, and declares that his record is true. Amid the shame and the spitting, the ribald mockery of those standing around, the desertion of his own disciples, the gloom and darkness of that sad hour, his resplendency, though hidden as behind a dark cloud for the time, would soon shine forth with inconceivable luster, and fill both earth and heaven. He who of old came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran, in the day of his power, amid the solitudes of Sinai, in the presence of his people Israel, whom he had brought out of the land of Egypt, with a high hand, and a stretched out arm, would, in the end of the days, be seen again coming in the clouds of heaven, sitting in majesty divine on the right hand of power. While "burning coals are going forth at his feet" he "measures the earth, drives asunder the nations, scatters the everlasting hills, and causes the perpetual hills to bow," "his glory covers the heavens, and the earth is full of his praise."* Of him, adjudged to death by an unjust decree, both God and the Son of Man, united in one person, of him, the subject of scorn and cruel mockery, in the depth of his humiliation, under the darkest cloud of sorrow and suffering, we must say, in the language of Holy Scripture, "His ways are everlasting."†

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* John 8. 19. † Ibid. 14. 7, 9.

From this high eminence, from a view of his character so superlatively exalted, we must descend and follow Him whom "the world knoweth not" ("for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory"),‡ step by step, along the bloody path to Golgotha. Very early in the morning, as the day was breaking, and the first faint gleam of light was showing itself in the east, —the first day of the Passover, when ordinarily all things were forgotten in the celebration of the feast, with its holy solemnities and peace-offerings, (the Paschal lamb having been eaten the previous evening),—the High Priests and elders returning to the hall with all haste, as if to anticipate the presence of the crowd, and the commotion to which it might give rise, "led Jesus away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate, the governor."§

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* Hab. 3. 3, 6. † Ibid. 3. 6. ‡ 1 Cor. 2. 8. § Matt. 27. 2.

All had been done in so short a time, so secretly, in the silence and darkness of the night,—when the vast multitude gathered together in the city to keep the feast were asleep, and none dreaming of such a thing,—that at this early hour it is not likely any were present save those most deeply interested in the result, including "the chief priests, Annas and Caiaphas, with the elders and scribes and the whole council,"* beside the band of men and officers who took Jesus, and now surrounded him on his way to the house of Pilate.

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, now steps forward upon this august stage, made so by the presence of "the Highest," and figures in the final scene. He had at this time been Procurator of Judea some eight or nine years, having been appointed by Tiberius Cæsar to succeed Valerius Gratus. These two governed Judea, in about equal proportions of time, during the entire reign of Tiberius, (counting from the date of the death of Cæsar Augustus), which lasted a little over twenty-two years. He was recalled just before the death of Tiberius; but when he arrived in Rome the emperor was dead, and we have but little trace of him afterward.

We have but little knowledge of his private or public life, though his long continuance in office would seem to argue favorably for him, were it not known that Tiberius was very reluctant to make any change in his appointments. Philo Judæus brings many and heavy charges against him, and it is possible there may be more or less ground for them, as Roman governors in general, placed over conquered provinces, were too apt to make use of their time and opportunities to enrich themselves, with but slight regard to what was just and right, and for the good of those they governed. Rarely was one brought to justice, as was the case with Verres when Cicero exposed his rapacity and cruelty, in one of his most eloquent orations. As to Pilate, in the case of our Saviour he made every effort to effect his release, and would assuredly have done so had he not been overborne by the clamor of the chief men among the Jews, and by the threat that they would report him to Tiberius as unfaithful to his trust, in releasing one who was an enemy to the government. That such would have been his course, had he not been intimidated by the fierce opposition of the most powerful and influential men in the nation, who could easily make their voice heard in Rome, and give any color they pleased to the transaction, is clear enough from what Peter tells us, as he directly charges the death of Christ upon the Jews, saying that they "denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go."* This is authoritative enough, and the whole narrative, from first to last, sustains what Peter so emphatically asserts. From the beginning Pilate was fully aware of the motive which instigated the rulers to persecute Christ—neither more nor less than envy at his unbounded popularity, which threw them into the shade, and made them for a time powerless with the people. No doubt his exposure of their hypocrisy, and of their vices,—hitherto hidden under the flimsy garb of superior sanctity that concealed all that was most detestable in their flagitious conduct—increased their enmity. Pilate saw beneath their pretended zeal for Cæsar, and seeing this showed his sense of justice, and a feeling of humanity, in trying to save Jesus out of their hands. The sacred writer, describing this, says of Pilate, "For he knew that for envy they had delivered him."*

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* Mark 15. 1.

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* Acts 3. 13

Perhaps the sun was hardly risen when Jesus was brought before Pilate. The great object was dispatch—to gain time—to get all accomplished before the news spread generally abroad. With the trial itself, and the condemnation, Pilate had nothing to do; all they wanted was the sanction of the governor to his death, and his execution by Roman soldiers.

With the early morning hour Pilate was called upon to give orders to this effect, and Jesus was led into the hall of the palace, called the judgment hall, where Pilate heard and decided criminal and perhaps civil cases, the Jews themselves standing without, because it was the Passover, and they would be hindered from keeping it if they went in, and thus ceremonially defiled themselves. Jesus then, our Jesus, stood alone in the hall before the judgment seat, while the High Priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people, with the soldiers, officers, and numerous adherents, were waiting without for the decision of the governor. The company that surrounded the entrance to the hall at first was numerically small; they had but one purpose, and were moved almost as puppets by their superiors. The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people were the main agents, the principal instruments, in bringing about the death of Christ. They prompted the zeal, stimulated the rage, excited the loud and furious cry of those who were under their control, and governed by their action. As they drew the string their adherents moved, as they called, these answered. The cry that sounded so loud in Pilate's ears was not that of the great mass of the people; he would not so much have heeded them, but the fierce, maddening demand of the first men of the nation, their high office clothing them with great power, their wealth, their vast influence, aided by nearly the whole body of the priesthood, all of these enraged against Christ, turned the scale, and finally overcame the firmness, and counteracted the kind intentions of Pontius Pilate.

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* Matt. 27. 18

He was not sufficiently behind the scenes, and could not well discriminate in the promiscuous roar between the voice of a party and that of the people generally. Even if he had, probably this would not have availed. He was fond of his place, and it would not do seriously to offend the most powerful men in the nation. That he went as far as he did, under the circumstances, must be placed to his credit. The sense of honor and justice surely was not wholly dead in this man's breast, if he was hardened in iniquity, as some are so ready to think, Apart from yielding to a clamor that threatened a tumult,* (more to be dreaded on account of the concourse of Jews present at the Passover than at any other time of the year) there is nothing in the conduct of Pilate that was not both just and humane, as it regards Christ; and if his action under these circumstances was so fair and considerate, we must receive with a degree of caution the savage invectives of Philo Judæus against him.

In consequence of the chief priests and scribes not entering the judgment hall, Pilate in what follows had to pass to and from the hall, questioning Jesus within, and then going out to intercede with his accusers without, strongly pleading for the life of Christ. When first he came into the hall in the early morning, roused perhaps from his sleep, he saw Jesus standing bound before him—of whom he must have heard much during the last three years. It could not well be but that a name so bruited abroad in the land must have reached his ears, as well as an account of his wonderful works. When then he saw him bound as a prisoner, and already under sentence of death, he seems to have had a feeling of awe, and treated him with the greatest deference. One of the charges brought against Jesus by the Jews when Pilate went out to them, in answer to his question, "What accusation bring ye against this man?"† was "that he made himself king,"—"saying that he himself is Christ a king."‡ To give a certain air of criminality to this charge, and make it weigh against Christ, and influence the mind of

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* Matt. 27 24. † John 18. 29.

‡ Compare John 19. 12. with Luke 23. 3.

Pilate through the official relation he sustained to Tiberius, bringing the fear of the emperor before his eyes, they add, "Whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar."*

Upon this Pilate, re-entering the judgment hall, approaches Christ, and says, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" When the Jews, carried away by the presence of Christ when he first appeared in the temple, in the beginning of his ministry, and astonished by his display of great power in purging the temple—calling that sacred edifice in effect "his house"—undertook to make Jesus king, he took himself away, knowing full well the mind of the fickle populace, and that when they found he would not go in the way they wished, they would turn against him, as the ebbing tide flows downward after having reached its appointed limit, in obedience to that divine behest, "So far shalt thou go and no farther." Again after the miracle of the loaves and fishes, when the multitude, utterly astounded at such an exhibition of Almighty power, would forcibly have made him king, he removed himself by his own mysterious agency out of their hands, and turning away from royalty, so coveted by the human heart, spent the night upon a lonely mountain in humble, fervent prayer. And when, lastly, an almost innumerable multitude hailed him upon his entrance into the city as their king, styling him the Son of David, and this in face of the whole body of the priesthood and the chief men of the nation—acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah,—he makes no response, but proceeds as usual, as if nothing especial had happened—to teach the people, and to heal the blind and the lame. He took no advantage of the enthusiasm which prevailed, but let it die out of itself, receiving it however as his proper due ; though he took no steps to assert his rights, or to claim his own.

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* Compare John 19. 12. with Luke 23. 3.

But now that Pilate puts the question directly to him, he does not deny, but acknowledges that he is "King of the Jews." Yet not in the ordinary acceptation of the word was he a king ; neither was his kingdom after the fashion of the kingdoms of this world. He derives his title from a new source, and traces its origin to his conquest and death ; victorious hero—Jesus is styled "First begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth."* "My kingdom," said our Lord, as if in friendly converse with Pilate, and not as one adjudged to death, "is not of this world." I am a King, it is true ; "to this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world,"† but the kingdom that I came into the world to establish is to be built on a wholly new basis—that of truth ; of the words that I speak ; the doctrine that I announce, and for which I am about to die. By inference Pilate must have clearly seen that while Jesus admitted he was "a King," there was no antagonism to Tiberius Cæsar in this admission ; and that the charge of the Jews that Jesus was no friend to Cæsar, and an enemy to his government, was wholly without foundation. In support of this view that the use of the sword was out of the question ; that he never contemplated a resort to arms, but depended wholly on moral suasion—the force of truth. He says, "If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews : but now is my kingdom not from hence."* In all this Jesus does not ignore that he is truly "the King of the Jews ;" and that as the Son of David, as the promised seed, he is yet to inherit the earth, and in the end of the days to sit on the throne of his father David. He speaks but of the basis on which his future visible kingdom and empire will rest,—that of truth. Pilate saw and felt this. Leaving Jesus in the hall, he went out to the Jews, who anxiously awaited the result of what transpired within.

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* Rev. 1. 5. † John 18. 37.

When Pilate presented himself, and told the Jews that he "found in him no fault,"† they became vociferous with rage, as if their victim was about to escape out of their hands ; and alleged that he went "throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to Jerusalem ; stirring up the people,"‡ intimating that his teaching incited the people to insurrection ; "perverting" them, and in effect "saying that there is another king,"§ beside Cæsar, even himself.

The allusion to Galilee led Pilate to inquire if Jesus was of Galilee ; and if so, that he properly belonged to the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas. Anxious to be rid of the responsibility weighing upon him, when Pilate found that Jesus was a Galilean, "he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time." Pilate may have had, and doubtless did have an ulterior motive for this, as he wished to propitiate Herod, and heal the breach between them by an act of deference. It is likely they were at odds by some infringement of the Roman governor on the jurisdiction of Herod; or in some way offending his dignity, or impugning his authority. Whatever was the ground of the offence, Pilate by sending Jesus to him, and leaving him to decide as to what should be done, conciliated his regard, and "the same day they were made friends together."

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* John 18. 36. † Ibid. ver. 38. ‡ Luke 3. 5.
§ Acts 17. 7.

Herod Antipas had long wished to see Jesus, and to witness some signal display of his miraculous power. When first he heard the name of Jesus with his innumerable mighty works, he thought within himself that John the Baptist had risen from the dead, and hence the miracles which he wrought now, though during his public ministry he performed none. Much time having elapsed since then, and Herod had come to recognize Jesus as a real person, if not as a prophet, as he did John the Baptist. Having been an attendant upon the ministry of John, knowing him well, and having often had personal conferences with him, his curiosity was greatly excited in regard to Christ, and he "was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him."*

Jesus is now taken from the palace of Pontius Pilate to that part of the city where Herod lodged.

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* Luke 23. 8.

He is hurried through the streets to the temporary residence of Herod, the chief priests and scribes accompanying him, and "vehemently" denouncing Christ to the Jewish Tetrarch, as they had done to Pilate. The meek demeanor of Christ had no power to assuage their angry passions; it rather seems to have inflamed them more and more: so a torrent gains force, volume, and impetuosity, as dammed up in its course. They were like wild beasts ready to be deprived of their prey; every passion of hate, malice, and envy inflamed them, as a bull in the arena is maddened, and for the time they lost sight of every other consideration save the gratification of their revenge. They were "fierce" with anger, and acted more like men that had lost their reason than as the spiritual teachers and wise rulers of the land. Eager to gratify a morbid curiosity, Herod "questioned Jesus with many words;" Pilate was more sparing of his words; but Herod Antipas as a Jew, and as one who had listened to the preaching of John, and almost professed himself a follower, "doing many things" that John required of him, had much to say, and gladly availed himself of the present opportunity, to free his mind, and gain a better knówledge of Christ.

His vanity was wounded, his self-love piqued, when he found he could not get Jesus to answer a single question that he propounded. Greatly irritated by the silence of Jesus, and this before so large an assemblage, as if Jesus meant to cast a stain upon his pride, and to humiliate him, while Herod finds in Jesus "nothing worthy of death," to gratify his petty malice he turns him over to his soldiers, to treat our blessed Lord as they see fit. And now follows a scene of impious mockery, somewhat similar to what occurred the previous night in the palace of the High Priest; only in that case it was Roman soldiers; in this it was Jewish, who, under any circumstances from the nature of their law were taught to show mercy even to the guilty; for though there are features in the Mosaic law which seem to savor of the code even of Draco, it is in itself, in its spirit and essence, essentially a law of mercy and love, as well as of truth and justice.

From what Herod suffered in his conscience in consequence of the death of John the Baptist we would have looked for something different now: but if he did not join in the treatment of Christ by his presence, he allowed his soldiers to do as they listed. In the way of derision as King of the Jews, they arrayed him in a gorgeous purple robe—they mocked at his pretensions, and loaded him with opprobrium. After this vile treatment, especially so, as Herod admitted he found in him nothing worthy of death—agreeing therein with the Roman governor,—Jesus was sent back, still surrounded and followed by the High Priests and scribes, to have the sentence of death ratified by Pilate. Pilate, after again and again vainly essaying to deliver Jesus out of their hands, at length most reluctantly assented to the death of Christ.

The morning in that eastern clime was now far advanced; the news had spread through the city like wildfire; but we greatly mistake if of that vast multitude we suppose that the larger proportion sided with the chief priests. These men had sprung a trap upon the people; and had hurried matters forward with a precipitancy that looked little like justice. They were but too conscious of the weakness of their cause to submit to any fair tribunal. At first few if any but their own adherents were present; as the crowd increased they used all their influence to turn it in one direction, with the enemies of Christ (and he had many, especially among the leading Pharisees, whose conduct he had so severely reproved but a few days before, bringing their vices out in broad day-light) they were successful; the remainder were intimidated, but they did not join in the mad cry crucify him; but they bemoaned what was taking place, and with deep lamentation they followed Jesus as he trod his weary way to Calvary.*

Among the things that weighed on Pilate's mind, and led him to make such repeated efforts to deliver Jesus out of the hands of the Jews, one was his wife's dream, who had in her sleep during the night on which the Passover was eaten, "suffered many things" because of him. "Have thou nothing to do with that just man,"† she said to her husband Pontius Pilate. Another was the assertion of the Jews, when they found that their charge of hostility to the Roman government fell to the ground, that Jesus "made himself the Son of God,"—a capital offence under the Jewish law—and that therefore Jesus "ought to die." But this made Pilate "the more afraid."‡ All the while, through the whole course of these strange and extraordinary proceedings, it is perfectly clear that Pilate felt the presence of Christ—the sacred halo that surrounded him; while at the same time the record of his wonderful cures, of his great popularity, and his blameless life, must have been familiar to his ears. Besides he knew Jesus had created no popular disturbances; and had in the payment of tribute, and the enforcing obedience to Cæsar, demeaned himself as a good citizen, showing that he was no innovator. In addition to this, the late entry of Jesus into the city, amid the acclamations of the populace, was followed by no political commotion; the stream subsided into its customary channel with the going down of the sun, and the next day all was quiet as before. Pilate at the time residing in the palace on Zion's hill, must have known all this, and felt no alarm. Evil tidings had before been from time to time brought to his his ears by the High Priests concerning Christ, but without effect; so that from first to the last Pilate wavered not in the judgment he had formed o Christ.

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* Luke 23. 27. † Matt. 27. 19. ‡ John 19. 8.

But at length overborne, as we have seen, by the clamor and threats of the chief priests and others, he consented to their request, washing his hands (alas! as if he thought that could wipe off the deep stain) in the presence of the immense multitude now assembled together, friends and enemies, and declaring that he was "innocent of the blood of this just person."* At an early stage of the proceedings against Christ, Pilate told the Jews to take him and judge him according to their law; this they refused, that prophecy might be fulfilled by his death on the cross.*

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* Matt. 27. 24.

Not that crucifixion was peculiar to the Roman government; it was a mode of punishment among the Jews also. Alexander Jannæus, king of Judea, in the year eighty before Christ, and the twentieth of his warlike reign, crucified in one day, in the city of Jerusalem, eight hundred of his own countrymen, for their persistency in the crime of rebellion, after he had made overtures of peace, and tried every method of conciliation to induce them to lay down their arms, and put an end to the civil war that then raged, and which was as a fire that could not be quenched. It was an act of dreadful atrocity, but it put an end to the war. But crucifixion was not the mode of death prescribed by the Jewish law for blasphemy; but stoning to death, as in the case afterward of the proto-martyr Stephen. Had the Jews assented to the proposal of Pilate, this would have been the manner of our Lord's death; and prophecy so strong and clear on this point, especially as enunciated by Christ, would not have been fulfilled.

Long before, the death of Jesus by the cross had been foretold and prefigured by the lifting up of the brazen serpent in the wilderness, and our Lord, in his discourse with Nicodemus, had said that "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up."† It was not enough that he should die, as Socrates died, but he must die the death of the cross. He must be suspended on a tree, a spectacle for men and angels. Among the Jews special shame and ignominy was attached to such a death, as if it brought with it the greatest disgrace and pain: hence in the Mosaic code it is written "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." It was not enough that Jesus should suffer and die, becoming "obedient unto death," but that he should expire on the cross, dying the most painful and ignominius death. Thus dying he descended to the lowest depths of infamy, in the service of our humanity, that he might raise us to the loftiest heights of glory and honor. In taking man's nature upon him what an act of condescension for God! All the while he was on earth he was among us as "one that serveth." In washing his disciples' feet, we see him performing one of the most menial of offices; in bearing patiently the gibes of menials, and the blows of soldiers, and the cruel mockery of those who were the chief agents of his death, the meekness and humility of Jesus appear in still more conspicuous colors, but the whole is crowned by his most shameful, painful, and lingering death. See we not in this an evident design on the part of God to cast a stain upon all human glory, and to teach us the great and important lesson, more needed than any other in the history of the world, that he that "humbleth himself shall be exalted."

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* John 18. 31, 32. † Ibid. 3. 14.

Does the world need any lesson so much as this? And may not he that runneth read it, as he beholds Jesus "the Lord of glory," the "author of life," the "Light of the world," the impersonation of Truth, as he stood before Pilate's judgment seat; extended on the cross, dying for our sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, "being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." What a sight is here! What a spectacle to behold! And shall not vain man hide his face in the dust; become as a little child, as Christ taught, lay aside vain glory, and be satisfied with "the honor that cometh from God." From the cradle to the cross, from the stable in Bethlehem to Calvary—from his low condition in life—from the choice of his disciples—from his poverty—from his "meek and lowly" spirit, exemplified in every word and action—should we not learn from the example of our great High Priest to put away high thoughts, and walk through life as he also walked; taking him as a pattern that we should follow his steps, and be conformed to his death. Would this weaken our self-respect? or make us less assiduous to fill our proper sphere in life? On the contrary we would rise higher from a sense of true nobility of character; and we would find that inward rest—that tranquil flow of spirits which arises from self-abnegation, and which fits us, as nothing else can, to fill and adorn our proper place in life. Was our Lord any the less fitted for his walk in life through self-abnegation? or is the virtue of his name less efficacious because it is connected with the cross? On the contrary it is this which gives it the power to destroy pride in the human soul; to humble man in the dust, and to give to man that genuine sorrow for sin—that godly sorrow, that deep repentance, which springing from the very depths of the soul needs not to be repented of; but produces an absolute change in our nature, and a complete transformation of life. Herein is the mystery of the cross; and the design is that our "faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." When the nation of the Jews, in the ages to come—ages, days, years, more illustrious even than those in the past—the cross, rising to view, and standing out in the foreground of their future history—shall "look upon him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born."* This is the sword that shall pierce through their hearts, as it pierced through the heart of Mary the mother of Christ; revealing to their astonished sight, that in crucifying him they put to death the Prince of Life; "putting him to an open shame," and bringing down upon themselves national destruction. It is the cross that will do this, the cross of Christ, all stained with hallowed blood. This is not a sentimental allusion, to draw tears from the eyes which are dried as soon as shed. It is not a picture for a painter merely; but it is a divine reality, as the past has shown, and the future will yet more gloriously show. It is a barbed arrow in the heart; it is a new moral power in our world, a mysterious agency like the wind which you cannot trace any more than the track of a serpent upon the rock, or a mark upon the sand when the refluent wave has wiped it out.

In the future conversion of the Jewish nation, and their rapturous acknowledgment of Jesus as their Messiah (preceded by a sorrow for what they did, "as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon, the land mourning, every family apart"),* the world will have such a proof of its power as it never had before, and it will then be seen, known, and acknowledged as the mightiest element in the regeneration of the race. From death cometh life, and from the mystery of the cross an illumination which shall drive all darkness out of our world, and solve the dark problem how "God can be just, and yet justify" (freely pardon), "the ungodly."

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* Zech. 12. 13.

We cannot yet leave this theme. All that is dear to man hangs around it ; all the healing virtue that was in Christ, and that went forth from him like an electric spark by a touch, all the power that belongs to the mention of his name, infinitely intensified by the gift of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, all are associated with the cross of Calvary, and his dying thereon, and cannot be dissociated from it, and as it respects both Jew and Gentile is the lever that is yet to move the world. So Jesus viewed it—"I, if I be lifted up will draw all men unto me." This refers not only to his death, but to the manner of it. The more infamy the more glory ; the more humiliation the more exaltation ; the more the dishonor that attends it, the better fitted to answer the divine purpose. This is the only way to reach the rank pride of the human soul (had there been any other way the wisdom of God would have found it), and so prepare it for that abnegation of rank, and pomp, and power, the love of which is the origin of nearly all our wars, and the fruitful source of that universal rivalry which keeps society in a state of perpetual discord and restlessness.

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* Zech. 12. 11, 10.

It is the seeming weakness of the instrument, the absence of human strength, the utter impossibility of ascribing the power that dwells in it to the intellect of man, to his reasoning powers (which make man aspire to be the equal of, if not superior to God), which make the cross harmonize with the scheme of man's redemption as nothing else could do. Everywhere, in the volume of divine revelation, we see that God's plan, from first to last, is to humble man so that "no flesh should glory in his presence." Endowed with Godlike capacity, able almost to build a world himself, man, unrestrained, cannot submit to an equal ; as with Cæsar or Pompey, it is all or nothing, and it is with a view to meet this uprising of the soul against even God, that the Supreme takes our nature, and by his obedience unto death, with all its shameful concomitants, teaches us to descend in order to rise ; to die in order to live. He thus "lays the axe at the root of the tree ;" curbs our lust ; rebukes Satan, who started from this point, and brings order into our universe by the destruction of self and every ungovernable passion in the human soul ; while to God we ascribe. and give all the riches, honor, glory, blessing, wisdom and power that we once vainly, and regardlessly of any higher power ascribed to ourselves, forgetful of the source from whence we derived our almost illimitable powers.

Apart from this, from the cross of Christ, the ignominy of his death, neither heaven nor earth would ever be at peace. The discord began in heaven, descended to the earth, and has ever since prevailed, in consequence of the greatness of man's powers, and yet God could not endow him with less to constitute him a suitable companion for himself. Satan, the chief archangel, led the way in the abuse of these high powers—this intellect inferior only to that of God ; in the prostration of these moral qualities, the exact resemblance of those of the Almighty ; man quickly followed in the wake of the fallen archangel, spreading wide abroad sin and death in our world, till God, in fashion as a man, came among us, and by his death on the cross struck the deadliest blow at the insensate pride of the human heart which it ever received, and opened the way for the entire renewal of man in his own image, and so caused the foundation to be laid for the restoration of harmony throughout the whole of God's mighty universe, in heaven above, and on the earth beneath, and even to the lower parts of the earth, however now hidden from the view of man.*

In contrast with this (for "known unto God are all his ways"—the end of all his designs, the fruition of all his wishes toward his creature man), we have Greece attaining the highest degree of mental culture ; in sculpture, architecture, painting, poetry, eloquence, history, philosophy, and language, rising to the highest point of excellence, leaving every other nation far behind; and yet deficient in that moral power which flows from the cross. Both Greek and Roman sages confessed this. The power to renovate the human soul was wanting; and whatever knowledge they had of God, or of the soul, they derived in a great measure either from the Egyptians (who received it from very early tradition, even before the time of Abraham), or the Jews: or, what is most likely, from both. So it came to pass in the course of time, in the progress of knowledge, of science, and of art, "after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."*

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* "Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth. He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." Ephes. 4. 9, 10.

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Thus in contemplating the death of Christ, and following him step by step on his weary way to the cross, we have been for the first time led away from the course of our narrative, and the testimony of Jesus, to speak somewhat at large, of the cross of Christ, and the intent of so painful and shameful a death. It is true what we have said lies on the very surface of divine truth; still we could not pass it by without some enlargement, inasmuch as it is God's own appointed way or method of "reconciling all things unto himself;"† of "gathering together in one" ("having made peace through the blood of the cross"‡) "all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him."§

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* 1 Cor. 1. 21. † Col. 1. 20. ‡ Ibid.

§ Eph. 1. 10.

It is with this wide scope of vision before our eyes, as in an immense amphitheater, even the restoration of our fallen race to the favor and friendship of God, and readjustment of the present condition of things at the time of "the restitution of all things"* (is not this a design and end worthy of the infinite Creator?)—that we see Jesus, on the first day of the Jewish Passover, crowned with a crown of thorns, arrayed in a mock purple robe, having been despoiled of his own garments, after the most brutal treatment by the Gentiles, the Roman soldiers,—but bearing every indignity with the most perfect patience, answering neither by word or look the blows and ribald mockery of the soldiers, followed closely up by the false charges and loud cries of the chief priests and elders of the people—go forth bearing, till nature sank under the load, his own cross on which he was to be crucified.

The morning was now considerably advanced; the whole city was astir, and the vast multitude, pouring along through the streets, and hastening from the temple and the worship and ceremonies of the day, followed Christ, the blood from his scourged back marking the road. The blood-stained lash had made long furrows there! But ah, was ever seen so sad a face! so worn with the deepest lines of care. The sorrows of a world were pictured there, "the anguish and distracting care." When on the way Jesus stood, making a pause, he was motionless as a statue. Never was seen a sight so dark, so sad, so mournful—of all the mournful spectacles the world had seen go by in long procession, from time's beginning and earth's first dawn to this present moment. Slowly he moves, bearing his heavy cross—fainting under the load. But what was the weight of that to the world's sin which he is about to bear away on his mangled body. Was not this a sight for men and angels—angels flying from above to witness the strange, mysterious agony—this hanging on the cross. But the face, the face, the inexpressible sadness, yet sweetness that it wore—a pitying look natheless—pity and ineffable love both mingled there through every lineament,—like that which broke poor faithless Peter's heart. "As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men."* True; but he is a conqueror still; a King, more so than ever. For "so," in this guise, in these trappings of woe—bearing his cross—regarded by many who were looking on as a "deceiver" and a common "malefactor," yet under this heavy load of grief, and sin ,and shame, he "sprinkles many nations,"† "sprinkling clean water upon them;"‡ "pouring out on the Gentiles also the gift of the Holy Ghost;"§ and so bringing around, through this most mysterious tragedy, the promised day when "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever."‖

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* Acts 3 21.

As then Jesus walks slowly along the VIA DOLOROSO, bearing his cross, and about to be crucified, we must view him prospectively not as wearing the tiara, but the diadem of nations; going "forth conquering, and to conquer,"* "clothed with a vesture dipped in blood,"† and having "on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." Amid then the shame and the humiliation, the tears of friends, and the studied revilings of bitter and malignant enemies, looking to the great prize at the end of the race—the ransom of a world—we must still remember, whoever may gainsay it, that "the Word," that is, "God was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth."‡ Could the eyes of the people have been opened, as were those of the young man who accompanied the prophet Elisha, when surrounded by a host of foes, they would have seen legions of angels, "the armies which are in heaven following him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean."§ And had their spiritual vision been fully opened, so that they could see into the distant future, they would have beheld, "coming out of the mouth" of "the man of sorrows" while bearing his cross, "a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."‖

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* Isa. 52. 14. † Ibid. ver. 15. ‡ Ezek. 36. 25.

§ Acts 10. 45. ‖ Rev. 11. 15.

All that is most solemn and awful in connection with the destiny of man, and the future of our world, all that is so dark and enigmatical, which men try in vain to unravel, "the mystery of iniquity," the existence of sin, sorrow, and death, all will find its complete solution in the scene now about to be unfolded to human eyes. All the way from the palace on Zion's hill to Calvary the streets are lined with people; a vast multitude; and while the High Priests, the scribes, and the elders derided, as did the Roman soldiers in the judgment hall, in mockery "bowing the knee, and saying, Hail, King of the Jews,"* "a great company of people and of women followed him, which also bewailed and lamented him."† And of these, it is also said, when they saw him hanging on a tree, "they smote their breasts;"‡ they did not join in the cry which arose from many voices, "Crucify him, crucify him." As Socrates, in his prison, on the day of his death, sought to console his friends, discoursing to them on the immortality of the soul, so our Lord (Simon the Cyrenian having relieved him of the burden of his cross), sympathizing with them on account of coming evils, turned around, and addressing especially the women, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children." There was weeping then at the sight of the sad spectacle; many tears were freely shed; many a bosom was oppressed with grief. This human source of sweet consolation was not withdrawn from Christ; there were some flowers, richly blooming, strewed along this thorny road. The solace was welcome to a soul in misery, but the distress of Jesus did not make him unmindful of the dreadful calamity that would soon fall upon this nation, its city and holy temple: "For behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck; for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled."*

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* Rev. 6. 2. † Ibid. 19. 16. ‡ John 1. 14.

§ Rev. 19. 14. ‖ Ibid. ver. 15.

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* Matt. 27. 29. † Luke 23. 27. ‡ Ibid. ver. 48.

This was no ideal picture, drawn from an airy fancy, or as some might have imagined, the words of a dreamer, which then fell on the ear; the destruction of Jerusalem, with all its attendant train of evils, as minutely described by Josephus, tells the sad story, and is the best commentary on the words of Christ. Time does not weaken, neither can it efface, the true and impartial records of history. This is an age of skepticism, even among the Jews, but in God's own good time they will see with their own eyes the latter part of the prediction (the one wholly dependent on the other) fully verified:

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* Luke 23. 28, 29: See also Luke 21. 23, 24. We have connected these two passages, though only the first two were spoken by Jesus on his way to execution; the other two, spoken on Mount Olivet to the disciples, we have added, because, though they weaken the pathos of Christ's address to the daughters of Jerusalem they describe what actually soon took place: while they also point to the rebuilding of the city in its pristine beauty and grandeur at a future day; now, perhaps, not so far off as some may think.

Jerusalem shaking off the dust, rising up from the ground, no longer debased in the sight of the nations, clothed with beauty, a diadem on her head, the sceptre of righteousness in her right hand, and the glory, joy, and excellency of the whole earth. "Thou shalt also," saith the Lord by the mouth of his holy prophet, speaking of Zion, his holy hill, literally, not allegorically, "be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married."*

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Can the reader wonder that we stay our steps, that we put our hands upon our mouths, and our mouths in the dust, as we approach Calvary, and survey Jesus, "the Prince of life,"† "by wicked hands crucified and slain."‡ The preternatural darkness which spread itself over "the whole earth,"§ as Gibbon the historian would seem strongly to intimate (though he modifies the expression), but throughout the land of Judea—began at the sixth hour—rising and covering the land with a sudden darkness, and closed at the ninth hour, the time of offering up of the evening sacrifice. The darkness prevailed all this time; hiding in a measure at least the strange appalling spectacle. Before this time rude jests were spoken; and the high priests and Scribes carrying their dire enmity even to the last, joined in the ill timed mockery; but doubtless as dark night fell upon the earth at mid-day, obscuring the light of the sun, a strange terror may have seized upon them, as it did upon the soldiers standing around the cross. Were they wholly insensible? When the earth shook, and the rocks were rent asunder; and graves, with a loud noise, were opened as by a sudden upheaval of the ground—were they still unmoved—secure—insensible? Or did fear arise in their minds, and scruples unbidden, like Banquo's ghost, rise up before their eyes, as if they had steeped their hands in innocent blood? If they did, as the day wore away, and the sun again shone forth, and the trembling ceased, while no harm was done, and their persons were safe, their terror subsided—their hatred returned, and they rejoiced at what they had accomplished—supposing that all would end here; and nothing more would be heard of Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

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* Isa. 62. 3, 4. In what glowing terms does Isaiah speak of this future day of "Jerusalem's brightness," not foreshadowing the glory of the Gentile church, but depicting in the very strongest and clearest manner the "salvation" of Jerusalem, situated on Zion's holy hill, which is yet in the fullness of time to "go forth as a lamp that burneth."

† Acts 3. 15. ‡ Ibid. 2. 23.

§ Gibbon's Rome. vol. 2, p. 379.

The pitiful cry of Jesus "lifted up" on the cross, "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness," "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* brings out the human nature of Christ in as strong relief as the stilling instantaneously with a word the waves of the sea, and the calling forth of Lazarus from the grave after he had been dead four days, shows his eternal power and Godhead. Both are alike displayed. For a moment the human is left by the divine; the last ray of hope departs, humanity is about to sink under a load from which it can never arise, "through the weakness of the flesh," unaided by the arm of God; hence the lamentable cry on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" While this demonstrates the weakness of humanity, it as conspicuously shows that there is but "one arm that can save, but one eye that can truly pity," so as to bring effectual relief to men. The necessity therefore of the Godhead veiled in the flesh is seen as much in this despairing cry of the man Christ Jesus, as it is in that supreme act of divinity the voluntary surrender of his own spirit to God when he gave up the ghost.

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* Matt. 27. 46.

But as if pity and care—human pity and care—were to find a lodgment in that breast to the last, and mingle in the tragic scene, like glimpses of light in darkness, or the departing rays of sunsetting, ere all was over, amid the greatest distress of the body Jesus turns his languid eye toward his mother standing near the cross, surveying her dying Son, and commits her to the care after his departure from the earth to John the beloved disciple; "and from that hour," we read, "that disciple took her to his own home."*

On the supposition that Jesus hung upon the cross (if we have a right even to suppose this), three hours before the darkness prevailed—what occurred in the way of dialogue between the two thieves, "on either side one," (the reader will recall here the words of prophecy, "and he was reckoned among the transgressors"), and also what one of the two said to Christ, with his answer—must have taken place between the third and sixth hour. All this time the multitude were looking on, the sun shining with the broad glare of day; some were "smiting their breasts," while others were saying in hideous mockery, "He saved others: let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God."* The chief priests were among these revilers, joining in the derision; jeering, scoffing; and thus breaking in upon the deep and solemn silence. All this while, also, during these hours, ere the darkness came, and when every object was conspicuous, "all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things."†

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* John 19. 37.

But after the darkness came on, in the very bone of the day, to use an expressive Hebraism, just as the sun reached the meridian, and spread over the whole land, beginning from Calvary, all minds were absorbed in this phenomenon, occurring as it did at such a time, and under such circumstances. Ere this then, one of the thieves had shown his faith in Christ. What was it that convinced him? Was it the patient endurance of Christ, as he hung upon the cross? Was it the love that he showed amid the agony of the crucifixion? Of one thing, to begin with, the thief was well aware—that was the innocence of Jesus. Of himself and his companion, who was jeering at our Saviour, he said, "we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss."[*] The thief knowing this, and seeing the calm, patient, and loving demeanor of Jesus, felt his heart, as we conceive, strongly drawn to him. Of course, from his own words we know that he had heard of him in the past—of his works and ways, his manner of life. Though a thief these things would not be kept from his ears—the wondrous news penetrated even into the dens of thieves—those who on account of their crimes had to skulk in hiding places in the day, and like beasts of prey only come out from their holes at night—and now while hanging on the cross he hears him addressed, in derision it is true—in the strangest manner; and in terms used referring to Jesus which could hardly fail in any case to awaken and fasten attention. The dying thief hears such words as these: "Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe:"[†] also such words as these fell on the ears of the dying man—spoken of Christ: "He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he would have him: for he said, I am the Son of God."[‡] Spoken as these words were in derision, they were not without their effect upon this criminal, less hardened than his fellow; especially as he knew that Jesus was guiltless of any crime. This was a basis in the first place on which to rest his faith and hope. "He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." The innocence of

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* Luke 23. 35.

† Ibid. ver. 49.

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[*] Luke 23. 41.
[†] Mark 15. 32.
[‡] Matt. 27. 43.

Jesus, his unjust condemnation, were present to the mind of the dying thief. This perhaps was the starting point; and a breach once made, the waters of salvation poured into his soul like an overflowing flood. What was that faith? how victorious in its nature and results, which gathering strength with every passing moment enabled him to believe in the coming kingdom of Christ the King of Israel, and its final establishment in our world. "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."* Of course to make understandingly this request he must have been illuminated from above; the dayspring from on high must have visited him; teaching him to call Jesus Lord, or Jehovah; and at the same time showing him not through a glass darkly, but in the light of divine revelation, what had been before shown to the prophets by diligent searching of the Scriptures, "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."† Almost as sudden as a flash truth came into his mind; his repentance was deep and sincere; his faith was perfect; he believed and entered into rest—entering the Master's vineyard at the eleventh hour of the day. With this act of love and mercy—this signal triumph of faith, a glory invested the cross which took from it all the shame and infamy; and gave full and ample pledge of its power to save in the ages to come; a power which, like that of the sun, never exhausts itself; but renews itself continually in the renovation of the soul—the removal of guilt—and the impartation of the life of God in the soul.

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* Luke 23. 42. † 1 Pet. 1. 11.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRAYER OF THE CROSS.

THE preceding chapter has extended itself to a great length; too much so, as its length might tire the reader. We divide it, therefore, here, and proceed to the closing prayer of Christ, dwelling also at the same time on a few additional particulars, ere we close the mournful theme, and let the curtain drop on the most tragic yet the most glorious spectacle the world has ever beheld, and which will fill all minds with love and wonder while eternal ages roll their ceaseless round.

One among the last things that Jesus did, dying on the cross, was to pray for the forgiveness of his murderers. He wept over the city, foreseeing its doom, though he knew full well then as afterward by whose hands he would be slain: mark too his lament over the "daughters of Jerusalem," as he was led forth to be crucified. This love for his people "beloved for the Father's sake," never left his bosom; it glowed there, like the perpetual fire on the altar, from of old; it was a love that many waters could not quench. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my Son out of Egypt."* And when Israel sojourned in the wilderness, wandering for "the trial of their faith," for the space of forty years, often parched with thirst, assailed by foes, the sun smiting them by day, and the moon by night, weary often and footworn, now despondent, and then rejoicing for some manifest deliverance, then Jesus, the angel of the covenant, the "Lord of glory," went before them, "O'er Arabia's sandy plains," in a pillar of fire by night, and a pillar of cloud by day. "In all their affliction he was afflicted," and now when hanging on the cross, his love burns with all its old intensity; with undiminished fervor. This is the feeling ever at the heart of Jesus, "O Israel how can I give thee up! Israel loved with an everlasting love." On the cross what is the cry that is uttered? what the prayer that ascends to heaven? "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."*

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* Hos. 11. 1.

They did not know who Jesus was; the veil that is over the mind of the Jews to this day in reading the Scriptures, was over it then, and even Christendom is at this day, more or less perplexed, weakened, and darkened, for lack of knowledge. They did not know that Jesus was Jehovah, that "the Word was made flesh," that "God was manifest in the flesh." They did not know that Jesus was "the true Light,"† that "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not."‡ When they crucified Jesus they did not know who it was they hung upon a tree. Peter says plainly, "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers."§ Thus Paul speaks, addressing the Corinthians, "But we speak the wisdom of God, in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory; which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."* Peter also, on, and ever after the day of Pentecost, preached to the same effect, and this in the same city where the deed was done; he was not afraid to say it, and to charge it home boldly upon the Jews. The language cannot well be misconstrued, and what he says he learned from the lips of Jesus himself; though the deep purport of the words Peter did not understand until the Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father was given, and this divine Interpreter took of the things of Christ, and showed them unto him, bringing all things to his remembrance, whatsoever Jesus had said to him. In the temple itself, where Jesus a little before had manifested his glory, and had said to wondering ears, "He that seeth me, seeth him that sent me," there Peter reiterated in effect the words of Christ, when addressing himself directly to the annoyed Jews, who had just witnessed the cure of "a certain man lame from his mother's womb," he says, "But ye denied the Holy One and the Just" (terms pre-eminently belonging to God), "and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince" (author) "of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses."† Thus, also, David, quoted by Peter on this most memorable day of Pentecost, speaking as a prophet of the resurrection of Christ, uses this language, precisely similar in its import to what he said in another place, "I saw the Lord" (that is Jehovah) "always before my face, for he is on my right hand that I should not be moved."*

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* Luke 23. 34 † John 1. 9. ‡ Ibid. ver. 10.

§ Acts 3. 17.

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* 1 Cor. 2. 7, 8 † Acts 3. 14. 15.

It is then on this ground that what even the rulers did was "through ignorance," that Jesus puts up his loving, all-prevailing prayer, almost with his last breath, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." So Peter, as we have also seen, affirms, "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." Thus also, as the reader has already seen, speaks Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles, "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

What words of love and tenderness are these! How sweetly they fall on the ear! What a lesson they teach! What an example for imitation they present. Is this the language of a "deceiver," as the Jews charged that Jesus was? "of a malefactor," of an "enemy to Cæsar;" of one that had "a devil"? How groundless were these charges: how readily they fall to the ground in the light of such language as this, of the dying love of Christ. "Having loved his own, he loved them to the end." As proof of this, when he rises from the grave, and commissions his disciples to preach the gospel to every creature, he makes it a condition that they should "begin at Jerusalem."†

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* Acts 2. 25. compared with Psa. 16. 8.

† Luke 24. 47.

Among the strange signs, and fearful tokens, accompanying the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, perhaps the most significant of all was the rending in two, in the centre, the veil of the temple, as Jesus expired; doubtless with a loud noise; and this of itself; no human hand employed. God doing this with his own right hand and holy arm. Were not those that served affrighted when they heard this? as if indeed the temple itself had parted asunder. And the priest who at that solemn hour administered at the altar of incense, what was the impression which was produced on his mind at this sudden rending of the veil of the temple, at a time when the court was usually filled with worshippers; all of whom had an opportunity to attest the fact; and could easily learn afterward that it took place as Jesus expired.

Darkness, deep, heavy darkness, had now prevailed for three mortal hours, not only over the city full, but over the whole land of Judea, not extending beyond the narrow limits of the holy land. The crowded city saw it all: those around the cross, and those engaged in the religious rites of the first day of the feast. Vast was the crowd gathered around at the feast: but still an immense multitude filled the city, its lanes, its streets, its courts, its market places. The temple was by no means deserted; an innumerable crowd of strangers from a distance were present, and though the solemnest tragedy of time at the same time was taking place, yet as it covered several hours, many were going and returning all the while, so that both city and temple was at no time, as we may suppose, entirely empty. But what were their feelings amid the darkness? the strange, unnatural darkness. And when the earth shook beneath their feet, and the great rocks in the vicinity of the city were heard to break asunder with a loud explosive sound, must not strange thoughts have passed through their troubled minds, and could they hardly fail to associate with these preternatural signs the strange, mysterious spectacle that was passing outside the gates of the city. We must recollect that everything relating to Jesus was well known, and perhaps there was not one of the million of human beings present at this time in Jerusalem, who did not understand the occasion of the death of Christ. Beside the superscription on the cross, written in three different languages, would tell its own tale. Pilate would have his own way in the writing of it, and it was placed in large letters over the head of Jesus, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. All that passed by could read and see for themselves, and if ignorant would inquire and learn. Under such circumstances of publicity, amid the gaze of myriads of his own countrymen, amid the mockery of some, of comparatively a small number, and the tears and lamentations of thousands upon thousands did Jesus expire, his death produced not by any physical cause, not a bone broken, but by his own act dismissing his soul from the body, as he said he had the power to do. A sudden trembling shaking the ground, darkness veiling the sky, Jesus with a loud cry dismissing by his own act his soul from his body, the Roman centurion who had watched it all, guarding the cross with a company of soldiers, consisting perhaps of a hundred men, was convinced, not simply of the innocency of Jesus, but that he was a divine person ; and in the warmth of his new love, " he glorified God, saying, Truly this was the Son of God."*

And now night was just descending upon the ill fated city ; and soon the Sabbath, a high day because of the Passover, would commence. The sun had come forth, the darkness had passed away; the crowd had dispersed ; but a few mourners lingered around the cross, which contained nothing now but the dead body of Christ. A spear pierced deep into the side of the crucified Jesus, had satisfied the soldiers of this ; and Pilate having given his consent, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took the body down from the cross, and wrapping it in fine linen, with spices procured by Nicodemus, they laid it in a newly hewn tomb, belonging to Joseph of Arimathea, prepared probably for himself, in a garden, outside the walls of the city (all the ground bloomed with gardens), not far from the place of the crucifixion ; and " a great stone was rolled to the door of the sepulchre."†

And did night, deep, solemn, night, rest at last upon the city. Six days had passed since the entry of Jesus in triumph, amid the acclamations of the people ; who sang to his praise, and saluted him as the Son of David—heir to the throne ; and of course King of the Jews. So the magi had spoken, coming from Persia, warned by a star, and inspired of God. All Jerusalem was stirred ; and Herod, greatly alarmed, as they asked, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."* It was an impressive deputation; with their train of camels; their attendants, and all the pomp that might be supposed to belong to an embassy to a great King. All Jerusalem rang with the report of this foreign embassy; and many a heart in daily expectation of the coming Messiah thrilled at the sound. So had the angels sung when they announced to the heaven taught shepherds (not so ignorant as Milton sings), the birth in the city of David, of a Saviour which is the Christ the Lord; in other words, Christ King of Israel. These were some of the words which greeted the new born infant upon his entrance into our world. Marvels had followed him ever since. Herod with vengeful ire had sought his life; but miraculously had he escaped. But now his work is done—he is nailed to the cross, crucified between two thieves, the inscription over his head—now bowed in death—is, This is Jesus the King of the Jews. He himself claimed the heaven born title before the High Priest and the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate; and now he is dead; and his body in the tomb. Silence, a solemn silence reigns over the city, sunk in sleep; the day's great event is over; the rulers have crucified Jesus—"being delivered" into their hands, "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,"† and "those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled."‡

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* Compare Luke 23. 47. with Matt 27. 54.

† Matt. 27. 60.

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* Matt. 2. 2. † Acts 2. 23. ‡ Ibid. 3. 18.

The day was past and gone. "All his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee" had returned to their several homes, or their temporary lodging places; the disciples, all save one—unhappy Judas Iscariot—forlorn and dejected, over wearied by the events of the preceding night—as well as by what had occurred on that day—heart sick had sought rest, filled with the most conflicting emotions. The women—the mother and the rest, where and how did they spend that night, while the body of Jesus lay in the tomb? How was it in Bethany? Had they given up all hope—those sisters who believed that Jesus could raise their brother Lazarus from the dead? Had the last ray of hope left their swelling bosoms; and were all their expectations of Immanuel Jesus their King buried with him in his grave? And the chief priests and Scribes were they yet tormented with disquieting thoughts? It would really seem from what they did the next day, that Jesus laid in the grave did not wholly remove their fears of his revival, and resurrection on the third day.

And Nathaniel, "that Israelite indeed," who, among the first to believe in Jesus, said, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel!" where was he as the tomb closed on Christ? Had his faith failed? And Andrew who said to his brother Simon, "We have found the Messias:" and Philip who said to his friend and beloved brother Nathaniel, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Where were these early and decided followers of the Lord Jesus, amid the decay of their hopes, and the ruin of their expectations? It is possible, for a time, taken by surprise, and under the influence of strong temptation (as in the case of Moses, that man of God, at the waters of Meribah, as also the case of Elijah, fleeing for his life before Jezebel), for true lovers of Christ to fall into a state of unbelief; and in the weakness and darkness of such an hour to belie to a greater or lesser extent, their former profession. It must be admitted, we think, so far as we are able to trace the footsteps of the disciples, to excogitate their mental condition, their faith in Jesus, that it was for the most part, if not quite, buried in his grave; and that the redemption of Israel was indefinitely postponed. The blow of his death on the cross fell on them with stunning effect; they could not rise above it: and though they had on several occasions, and especially in respect to Lazarus, yet it would most certainly appear as if they could not conceive of his raising himself from the dead by the power by which he had raised others.

The day following the crucifixion—the Jewish Sabbath—passed marked by but one incident of importance; the Jewish rulers went to Pilate with these strange words upon their lips: "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again."* So he had, over and over again, precisely in the words used by the chief priests and Pharisees. They were not spoken in the form of a figure of speech, or with the slightest tinge of obscurity, but in as plain words as could be used;† so that the wonder is that none of the minds of the disciples, nor of the women, lighted upon this sweet word of promise, and sent a ray of hope into the darkened tomb. A veil was on their minds; and though they heard Jesus so often say, "After three days I will rise again," the words made no distinct impression at the time, and after his death they were not called to mind; not even until they were actually fulfilled were they recalled to their fond remembrance. But the rulers of the Jews had noted them; hence their request to Pilate and his answer to them, "Ye have a watch."—(They had asked for a guard to make the tomb secure, "lest his disciples come and steal him away.")—"Go your way, make it as secure as ye can." "So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch."*

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* Matt. 27. 63.

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* Matt. 20. 19. † Ibid. 27 64, 65, 66.

BOOK NINTH.

CHAPTER I.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

> "On the cold cheek of death smiles and roses are blending,
> And beauty, immortal, awakes from the tomb."
>
> BEATTIE.

THAT Jewish Sabbath was doubtless to many, even of those who were not the intimates of Jesus, a day of sadness and stillness: those for instance, who, on the preceding day, "came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned."* Among this number were those women who following Jesus to Calvary, "bewailed and lamented him," and whom he had addressed, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." As for the Scribes and Pharisees, they retained all their old enmity; it followed him to his grave; so that violating the Sabbath, as we have seen, they took measures to secure his body, and prevent the fulfillment of those ominous words, "After three days I will rise again;" saying, "so the last error shall be worse than the first."* These were the anxious thoughts that agitated the minds of Annas and Caiaphas, with the rulers of the people, while the hours of the Sabbath were passing away one after the other, and the morning of the first day of the week was hastening on. There was many a sorrowful heart worshipping in the temple that day, while the services of religion went on as usual. Mary Magdalene was one of this number; and the mother, concerning whose then infant son, in view of his death on the cross Simeon had said, "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also," the mother of our Lord, now beginning to descend the vale of years, she who was "blessed among women," who will enter the secret chamber of her heart, and draw to light what was passing in her mind during the long, weary, almost unending hours of this holy Sabbath day. Where were they spent? Doubtless in the sanctuary; for that was the Lord's house. There she sought and found strength; and perhaps received some distinct revelation from heaven as to what would follow on the third day. We cannot allow ourselves to think that she of all the rest had lost all hope; some ray of divine consolation may have lingered around her distressed heart; and perhaps bade her "be of good cheer." Her yearning heart, as we conceive, could not, in the nature of things, give up all as forever lost, and as buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

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* Luke 23. 48.

But whatever were the fears or hopes of friends or of foes, the dawning of another morning soon changed the scene, as in a theater; and as day dispels night, so the rising of Jesus from the dead, and his issuing forth from the tomb—(as a victor in the Olympic games, crowned with laurel), burst the dark barrier of the domain of death—appeared in the full luster of his glorious body once more among men. To the pallid cheek returned the roseate hue of life; the heart that had ceased to beat, beat once more; the limbs that had become stiff in death, moved again; the cold and lifeless body regained its natural warmth, and resumed its usual functions. The soul, the animating principle of life, having temporarily left the body, came back to its old home; and death lost the first victim that would never again be folded in its dread embrace.—Morning never to be forgotten!

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* Matt. 27. 64.

Of what avail was the seal placed on the stone; or the night watch that guarded the sepulchre? How vain the one, how helpless the other. The current, the warm current of life that death had heretofore stopped, despite all the efforts of human ingenuity, in whatever direction exercised, that had so long baffled the skill of the votaries of occult science, would now resume its course, unobstructed, surmounting all obstacles, forever deepening and widening, and flowing in the same channel as that of God himself. What a victory was here achieved; what a triumph over the powers of darkness. What a deliverance from that "fear of death" which threw its ghastly shadow over the sunniest pictures of life; which seized us in its iron and relentless grip, and ever kept us there, as soon as we were at all able to think, almost even from the very first moment of dawning consciousness. Jesus, in rising from the dead, rolled away in fact the stone from every grave, even as the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and rolled away the great stone, sealed with the seal of the High Priest, from before his sepulchre.

What, we might ask, were the feelings of the disciples, and of the women (none dearer to Christ) as the fact slowly dawned upon them, that he whom they mourned as dead, and whose body they were preparing to embalm with myrrh and aloes, was alive and "risen from the dead, as he said."* Mary Magdalene, woman always foremost in love, was the first at the tomb. She slept but little that night; "her tears were on her cheeks;" "she had wept sore in the night" (she had more cause for weeping than the prophet Jeremiah, even if "the city did sit solitary, that was full of people"†), and before the day broke, "when it was yet dark," she rose from her sleepless bed, and having the night of the burial ascertained the locality of the sepulchre, in the ardor of her love, anxious to pay the last sacred rites to one so dearly loved, she came to the tomb where they had laid him. What was her surprise and grief when she found the seal broken, no guard there (she might not have known of this measure of the rulers), and the stone rolled away from the mouth of the sepulchre. All alone she stood there; enough of daylight at this time to discover upon looking in that the body of Jesus was not there. As yet no thought of the great reality, of the wonderful fact, had risen in her mind; even the absence of the body did not suggest the truth. This is evident from what she said to Peter and John, to whom she first communicated what she had seen. Having found them on her return to the city, and the place of their abode, she said in her great distress, "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him."* All was dark to Peter and John at this stage of the history of the resurrection as it was to loving, faithful Mary Magdalene. These also had "mourned and wept"† during the night; and sad and weary, worn with the long strain upon their minds, they had waited for the day as they that watch for the morning. When told by Mary of what had happened, doubting not, however, but that she was mistaken, they ran to see for themselves; and it was not till they themselves had entered the sepulchre and found it empty, that they were satisfied. Peter went in first, and John followed, though John arrived at the sepulchre before Peter. Thus we read, "Then went in also that other disciple which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw and believed."† Even now it did not occur to either John or Peter, any more than to Mary Magdalene, that Jesus had in fact risen from the dead. The veil still obscured their mental vision; they were as yet wholly in the dark as to the resurrection of Christ; and that the truly royal way to the throne of David, and universal monarchy here on this earth, was through the dark chambers of the dead. This was the only way by which the sun of royalty would rise, and never set again. Instead of riding to power through fields of blood, it was through the field of death, with the slain lying thick around on every hand, that Jesus was to make his victorious way, and ascend, and forever hold the throne of his father David; while of his kingdom there would be no end. This royal way to universal empire these disciples as yet saw not; and even the absence of the body did not suggest the first thought of the resurrection of their Lord and Master. This "wisdom of God in a mystery," was so completely hidden from them, that when they saw the linen clothes lie "in which Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had "wound the body of Jesus," and "the napkin that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself,"* no impression of the great fact was produced; "for as yet," up to this time, "they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead."†

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* Matt. 28. 6. † Lam. 1. 1, 2.

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* John 20. 2. † Mark 36. 10. ‡ John 20. 8.

As yet none of them had seen the Lord, now victor over death and the grave—triumphant victor—far more so than the greatest of earthly conquerors, whose names figure so largely in the annals of time—over man's deadliest, and hitherto unconquerable foe. But ere long he was seen by Mary Magdalene and other dear women who had kept close by his bleeding side, and by Simon; and toward the evening of the day of his resurrection by two of his disciples as they were on their way to Emmaus; and lastly at night by all the disciples save Thomas. It was not until a week after, in the same place, of an evening, Thomas saw and believed. Every doubt removed, all fears gone, it was on this memorable occasion that he made the celebrated declaration, "My Lord and my God:"* thus acknowledging the supreme divinity, the eternal power and godhead of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In anticipation of the great day of Pentecost, Jesus had breathed on them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost."† Aided by this divine illumination, which was the beginning of the fulfillment of "the promise of the Father," the film was removed from all their eyes; they now saw light in the light of God, reaping the first fruits of Christ's death, and Thomas was enabled to say with the holy fervor of an undoubting conviction of "a perfect faith," imparted from on high, "My Lord and my God."

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* John 20. 7. † Ibid. ver. 9.

CHAPTER II.

THE FORTY DAYS ON EARTH.

WHY should any object, or think it was lowering the great work of human redemption that Jesus should once more appear on earth among men, and reign King of kings, and Lord of Lords? Why think it beneath him to receive, just as it reads, the prophecy of Zechariah, "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one."* The names of "Father" and "Son" shall be merged in one "Lord of all," "God over all, blessed forevermore." As when a great building is erected the scaffolding is taken down when the building is completed, so when Jesus shall have done his work, and "restored all things," according to the expectation of the Jews in the time of Christ, then will there be in very deed, "one Lord, and his name one." Jerusalem will surely then be as it never was before "The city of the great King."† "The Lord of Hosts shall then reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously."‡

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* John 20. 28.

† Ibid. 20. 22.

What a prospect is this for our earth, so long torn by "wars and rumors of wars; nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places."§ As the sea rests after a storm, the waves thereof ceasing to roar, and settling down as an infant on the breast, placid and calm, with its silvery surface mirror like reflecting the azure sky, bent as a bow, so when Jesus shall return to our earth to dwell among men, as his omnipotent word at once calmed the roaring sea, and hushed the raging tempest, so will his presence here restore peace and tranquillity; and bring back the golden age of primeval man ere the unruly passions found vent as first shown in the original fratricide. Is this too much to look for? The word of God is pledged to bring it to pass; and it must do so or its veracity is impeached, and its authority gone. Truth will never again lift up her head; and a worse darkness ensue than that which overspread the minds of the disciples when Jesus expired on rhe cross; or when chaos prevailed, and "the earth was without form, and void."

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* Zech. 14. 9. † Psa. 48. 2. called also "City of God." Ps. 87. 3.

‡ Isa. 24. 23. § Matt. 24. 6, 7.

On what is to come, independently of what is past, the future of our earth, the fulfillment of the song of the angels, in its entirety of "peace on earth," in the place of "wars and rumors of wars;" and "good will among men," even as it exists among the angels of God, we are willing this day to put the credibility of Holy Scripture. Why do men go back to find out the antiquity of man? what does it avail? There is no such thing as antiquity with God; and he who believes the Scriptural account of the creation of man, it does not matter whether man has existed on the earth six thousand years or a million of ages; for his existence on this earth, and its duration, is resolvable wholly into the will of God. Who can go back to a beginning where God is concerned? Millions of ages, and hundreds of millions, in the illimitable past. are no more to him than so many days; and with us they are a mighty blank, unpierced by human eye, and unknown to mortal thought. But with the future it is different; we are a part of it; and the as yet "unmeasured flight of years," belongs to us as a part of that "incorruptible inheritance" to which we were born, when God breathed into us a living soul. Here "boundless contiguity of space" opens to our ravished sight;

and we enter a theater, which like the august temples of Carnac and Luxor in ancient Egypt fill one with solemn awe; and excite thoughts and raise desires worthy of man; and suitable to that exalted nature, that original dignity, with which he is so amply endowed by his great Creator. The future eternity, this is the temple into which man enters through the door of divine revelation; and this is the stage on which he will stand and act his part; the part for which he was born; and this life if we act well our parts, will be but as the rehearsal, the preparation, for that greater and endless existence which is yet to come.

Jesus rising from the grave, does he make haste to leave this earth? Rejected by man, put to death in the flesh, is he ready to call down fire from heaven to consume it? Nay, he loves it still; he tarries yet longer upon it instead of returning at once to the skies. As David loved rebellious Absalom, his son Absalom, saying, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son,"* so Jesus loved our earth and world. What had he not already done for his vineyard! how often had he visited it in the past! now in one guise, and now in another, and had not his delight been with the children of men from Adam down? Did he not call Abraham his friend, and talk with him as such? with Moses also face to face, dwelling with him on Sinai's mount for the space of forty days, as well in innumerable ways had he not shown himself to men, thus maintaining a constant intercourse between heaven and earth. And now had he not, in a human form, tabernacled on the earth for many years; and shall we say the earth is not dear to him? The truth is men put God too far off from them; they do not know how near he is to man; how he has made him in his own likeness, and after his own heart. Jesus said to his disciples, "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." Could God come nearer to man—or take him more closely to his panting bosom?

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* 2 Sam. 18. 33.

Rising from the tomb, coming forth from among the dead, Jesus still delays his return to his heavenly abode, that he may yet more fully instruct his disciples, "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God," eating with them as they were assembled together in an upper room, and renewing in his glorified and seemingly unchanged body, that sweet, old, familiar intercourse which he had with them before his death and resurrection from the dead.*

What days must those have been during which the disciples were with Jesus after he had risen from the dead! What opportunities they had to identify his person, and to assure themselves that they were not mistaken, or deceived. On the first night of his resurrection from the dead, as "the eleven, and them that were with them, were gathered together"† "into an upper room,"‡ where they were wont to meet, Jesus, who, in the course of the day, had appeared to Mary Magdalene, and the other women, to Simon Peter, and the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, a village in the vicinity of Jerusalem, suddenly presented himself to all this little company; ere they were aware, without noise or warning, he "stood in the midst of them, and said unto them, Peace be unto you." To calm their fears, to remove all doubts as to his identity, he says to them, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have."* Even the incredulity of Thomas was made serviceable to the verification of the personal identity of Christ Jesus our Lord after his resurrection from the dead. "Reach hither," he said to Thomas, "thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing."†

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* Acts 1. 3, 4. † Luke 24. 33. ‡ Acts 1. 13.

Thomas did "put his finger into the print of the nails, and did thrust his hand into his side;" did satisfy himself that it was Jesus, and none other, and then made the acknowledgment of which we have spoken heretofore. Whatever actual change had taken place in the body of Christ, to the eye it was in form and substance (having flesh and bones) the very same body the disciples had known before it was laid in the tomb, with the addition of the prints of the nails in the hands, and the hole in the side, made by the soldier's spear, out of which came "blood and water."‡ Still further to satisfy them that they had not seen a spirit, but a living man with flesh and bones, a regularly organized body

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* Luke 24. 36–39. † John 20. 27. ‡ Ibid. 19 34.

(for as yet "they believed not for joy, and wondered"),* he took "a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb, and did eat before them."†

Was there ever a more honest narrative than this? There is not the slightest exaggeration, no attempt to color one of the greatest of all facts in which the future destiny of man is so closely involved. It is told with the same simplicity of language used in describing the creation of the world, or the production of light, the latter of which Longinus cites for its sublimity. It is the greatness of the act which is done, told with simplicity, as if it were a common every day occurrence, which constitutes the sublimity of this sentence in the Mosaic account of the creation of the world.

The two interviews, one occurring the evening of the first day of the week, the other the week after, were but the beginning of this new intercourse between Jesus and his disciples: there was an intermission, so to speak, during which we suppose Jesus was absent from them; but after this he was "seen" of them daily, as we understand it, for "forty days," in sweet and swift succession. At first, we are told, they could not "believe for joy." It was too great to be true;—but at length, proof following proof; interview succeeding to interview; Jesus talking to them as of old; familiarizing himself with them; "eating and drinking"‡ with them as he had before done; and above all explaining to them the Scriptures concerning himself, that "thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day,"* all doubts and fears were dissipated; their joy was without bounds; wonder was changed to transport; and all that was dark and mysterious before, which came so very near wrecking their faith in Christ as "the Saviour of the world," was now made plain as day. Their ignorance, their darkness, their unbelief; the denial of Peter, the flight of the disciples in the hour of peril, the incredulity of Thomas, their fright and astonishment when first they saw Jesus after he was risen from the dead, treating what the women said of the actual resurrection of Christ as "idle tales,"—all this speaks for itself; is not thrown in for effect; and is precisely what we should suppose would take place with plain, sensible, honest men, under existing circumstances.

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* Luke 24. 41. † Luke 24. 42, 43. ‡ Acts 10. 41.

CHAPTER III.

THE TWO CHIEF TOPICS OF DISCOURSE DURING THE FORTY DAYS.

THESE topics divide themselves into the following heads: First—The promise of the Father: Second—The kingdom of God. And in the whole range of divine revelation there is nothing in importance to be compared with these; as the fact that Jesus reserved them to the last for full discussion would seem to shew. What he had before said, especially on the first, was not understood: what he now said on this great theme would be comprehensible, because he had breathed on them, in anticipation of the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit; and had "opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures."* As to "restoring the kingdom to Israel," in due time, in the fullness of the times of the Gentiles, this also, as we may suppose, formed another large topic of discourse; as Jesus spent, we are told, part of the time of these precious forty days in "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.*

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* Luke 24. 46.

Under what a new light do we now behold Jesus the Lord! Victor in a thousand battles fought for the good of mankind; triumphant over man's greatest foe—death and the grave; standing unscorched by the seven times heated furnace through which he had passed with not even the smell of smoke upon his seamless garment; his vesture dipped in blood, 'tis true, but dyed not for himself but others, the crimson stain attaching because he was "wounded for our transgressions;" all his earthly probation passed, and the great ransom paid on the cross, the sin of the world taken away, the devil and his angels foiled in every encounter, the malice and hate of his enemies confounded, and the hopes of those who loved him so fondly, more than renewed by his resurrection from the dead, under what a different aspect does our Lord now appear! His work done; his triumph complete; the last battle fought, and every thing prepared, when his present brief sojourn was over, for his return to that world from which he came. But it is to be noted that though fresh from the domain of the dead, and about to return to the skies from whence he came, he does not withdraw the veil from the invisible world; it is enough that he satisfies us of its existence, leaving it to our own experience, when we enter on that state, to know what belongs to it; how much of pain or joy, and what the manner of life we will then live. None of us can know of this but from our own actual experience. But while not entering upon details of this nature with his disciples during the forty days that he continued with them, shedding little or no light upon the unknown, leaving neither chart nor compass to guide our bark as it is launched upon "that vast ocean we must sail so soon," he talks to them of that which it was absolutely essential for them to know, "the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me."[*]

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* Luke 24. 45. † Acts 1 3.

Of this John the Baptist spake in the beginning. "I indeed," he said, "baptize you with water unto repentance" (this was the extent to which John's baptism went), "but he that cometh after me" ('saying to the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is on Christ Jesus')[†] "is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire; whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."[‡] It is to this Jesus refers, in his conversation with his disciples, after his resurrection from the dead, and during the period of the forty days, reaffirming John's words, and substantiating his testimony concerning himself—when he says, "For John truly baptized with water: but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."* He commands them therefore not to "depart from Jerusalem," but to remain in the city where he had been crucified until they had "received the Holy Ghost."

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[*] Acts 1. 4. [†] Ibid. 19. 4. [‡] Matt. 3. 11, 12.

We thus see what stress Jesus laid upon this last best gift of God to man. The last night of his life he speaks on this point with equal explicitness: "It is," he said, "expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."† From this it clearly appears that Jesus must "ascend up on high, and lead captivity captive,"‡ before "the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost," "even the spirit of truth," could be given, and supply what Jesus withheld, and teach what their eyes being holden they could not see, what they could not learn until then. With express reference to what the Holy Ghost would reveal, whom our Lord would send after his ascension into heaven, Jesus said, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: teach you all things; and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."§

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* Acts 1. 5. † John 16. 7 ‡ Ephes. 4. 8. § John 16. 12.

It is but a little thing to refer to the ignorance of the apostles; we have had evidence enough already of the blindness of their .minds, and almost the hardness of their hearts, under the teaching of their divine Lord and Master. Take by way of illustration their false views, their mistaken notions of the immediate establishment of his kingdom here on this earth; assuming the throne of his father David, reigning over the house of Jacob; and as their Messiah abiding with them forever. So persuaded of this were they that all Jesus could say to the contrary availed nothing. As we have seen they held to this view to the last. Then of the Father they were ignorant. They could not see that Jesus was the root as well as the offspring of David: David's Lord as well as David's Son. Said Philip, feeling his way in the dark, seeking after God, if haply he might find him, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us."* Jesus in reply says, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father: from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him."† Afterward, with express reference to the coming of the Holy Ghost, seeing that as yet they did not get even a glimpse of the truth, which indeed the Spirit of Truth can alone reveal to man, Jesus says, "In that day" (after I have ascended to heaven, and sent the Holy Spirit), "I shall shew you plainly of the Father; I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs; and ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you."* So of the sufferings of Christ, they were completely ignorant ; as also of his death on the cross with all the attendant circumstances of shame and pain. Hence, after his resurrection Jesus uses these words, as he unfolded the Scriptures to them, referring to their past blindness and misapprehension of his language, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken ; ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?"†

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* John 14. 8. † Ibid. vers. 9 and 7.

But whatever else they did not know—while they were ignorant of what "Moses and all the prophets wrote" of the sufferings of Christ, while they knew not that in seeing Jesus, and knowing Jesus, they saw and knew the Father also, while with all the rest of their countrymen, they were carried away by the fond expectation of the present restoration of "the kingdom to Israel," seeing from afar its golden pinnacles, "cloud capt towers" and "gorgeous palaces," and nations drawn in its train, and ministering to its glory, and their Jesus as Messiah raised to the highest pinnacle of earthly fame—one thing they did know of a truth, and with the most undoubting conviction, that Jesus was the Christ, the Anointed one of God—the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. This was the point around which all their dearest hopes gathered, and for which they were ready to suffer the loss of all things, and for which indeed they had already left their all of earthly good. Their faith in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah began with the preaching and baptism of

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*John 16. 25. also John 14. 20. † Luke 24. 25, 26.

John, who taught them to "believe on him who should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus," who also when Jesus first appeared among them, pointed him out as "The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," and so laid the foundation of their faith in Christ. This was the beginning of their confidence in Jesus Christ the Lord; the source and fountain head from whence as a river it first flowed; forever after deepening and widening in its progress until it became perfect. By his teaching and miracles Jesus greatly strengthened their faith from time to time; though during his stay with them on the earth, it was subject more or less to fluctuations; now stronger, and anon not so strong. Still on the whole they knew and confessed that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

On one occasion, especially, while they were in the neighborhood of Cæsarea Philippi, not far from the sources of the Jordan, in the dominion of Herod Philip, that good ruler, and just man, Jesus to test the faith of the disciples, while they were journeying along, asked them this question: "Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?" The reply was, "Some say that thou art John the Baptist." This was the opinion, at one time, in the early period of our Lord's ministry, of Herod Antipas, the tetrarch, when he first "heard of the fame of Jesus." "This is John the Baptist," he said; "he is risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him."† Others said—such was the diversity of sentiment among the people—Elijah; others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. At this stage of the ministry of Christ this seems to have been the prevalent opinion, that Jesus was a prophet, or at the most "one of the old prophets risen again."* This was as far as they then went—the popular idea of Christ. Turning to his disciples, "Jesus said unto them, But whom say ye that I am?" Then it was we have the bold avowal of Peter, not only for himself, but for all the rest: "we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."†

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* Matt. 16. 16. † Ibid. 14. 2.

The faith of the disciples in Jesus did not get beyond this until after the resurrection. This was precisely the faith of Martha, sister of loving Mary. "I believe," she said, "that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world."‡ So it was with the woman of Samaria; her faith in Christ rose as on wings, so speedily did she pass from her perception of him as a prophet, to an acknowledgment of him as Messias: "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"§ Many more of the Samaritans believed, not so much for the saying of the woman, as "of his own word:" saying, "We have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."‖

Beyond this limit none; neither of his immediate disciples or chosen friends and followers passed during our Lord's stay on the earth. The Holy

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* Luke 9. 19. † John 6. 69. ‡ Ibid. 11. 27.

§ Ibid. 4. 29. ‖ Ibid. ver. 52.

Spirit was given unto them "by measure."[*] A measure of the Spirit was given unto them; but not in its superabounding plenitude, not in its "fulness" as afterward. This, as we have seen, was kept back until the coming of the Holy Ghost; then all that was dark fled away: what Jesus enigmatically said of the destruction of the temple and his rebuilding it in three days, they then saw referred to the great fact of his resurrection from the dead. So also what he had so often said of his death was understood; and above all, the glorious truth that Jesus was "the Prince of life;"[†] and that the Jews in crucifying Jesus, "denied the Holy one and the Just, and in his stead desired a murderer to be granted unto them,"[‡] now burst upon their heretofore darkened minds. These words of Jesus had now come fully to pass, that he would "shew them plainly of the Father;" and the disciples were witness of their exact fulfillment: and what was, and still is, least understood, that Jesus "was in the Father, and the Father in him," and that "he that seeth Jesus seeth him that sent him" (and not some one else), was made plain by the gift of the Holy Ghost. It is not here a question of why this was so; though we may say that as it regards God's scheme for the redemption of the world, there is a gradual development of light and strength; that the entire plan is a unity; perfectly symmetrical in all its parts; and like an arch bound together by the keystone.

Under the light of the gift of God, that is, of the Holy Spirit, a new dispensation is introduced, far in advance of any that has preceded it, both in respect to light and power; but what is chiefly essential, around which all the rest clusters, which indeed is the golden orb of the system, as the sun is the center of the planetary world, is the solemn and awful truth that Jesus is Jehovah: according to his own declaration, this declaration agreeing with what is said of Jehovah in the Old Testament: "I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."*

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[*] John 3. 34. [†] Acts 3. 15. [‡] Ibid. 3. 14.

The order of the divine government is not altered, the claims of God's holy law are not weakened or set aside, sin is not the less sinful, but on the contrary the evil and the guilt of sin are enhanced, the sense of sin is made more pungent—more harrowing to the soul—by the change in the mode of administration (we know not else how to express it) under the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself shows us wherein the change would consist: He says, "When the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, is come, He will reprove the world of sin and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged."†

Faith in Jesus as the Saviour of the world is the first requisition, and especially according to the revealings of the Holy Spirit—"for no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, that is, Jehovah, but by the Holy Ghost."* Here the cross comes in, all stained with hallowed blood, and love, dying love, victorious where all else had failed to move and break the stony heart, wins the day. Thus it was with the Jews on the day of Pentecost; unbelief they now saw had nailed to the cross "the Prince of life," they had "denied the Holy One and the Just, they had "crucified the Son of God, and had put him to open shame," and sorrow for what they had done overwhelmed them, while the love of Jesus in suffering for them, and dying for their sins, especially when they remembered that it was "the Lord of glory" who hung suspended on the shameful cross, agonized their hearts, and led them to cry out in the anguish of their souls, "men and brethren what shall we do?" The remedy was close at hand; they were convinced of the sin of unbelief in rejecting Christ, by the Holy Ghost, and all they had to do was to repent of that sin; to believe in Christ, and receive all the benefits of his passion and death.

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* Rev. 1. 17, 18. The reader will turn to the prophecy of Isaiah, and he will find these words: "I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God." Isa. 44. 6. See, also, Isa. 41. 4. and 48. 12.

† John 16. 8-11., with John 14. 26.

Since the coming of the Holy Ghost, the cross, the cross of Calvary, wherever set forth, has been God's appointed instrument for convincing the world of sin; subduing rebellious hearts; "abolishing in his flesh the enmity" which exists in the human against "a law which is holy, just and good," thereby bringing man into a state of harmony with the divine mind, "so making peace."† This is the standard of victory; the ensign of the nations. By this we conquer: not by the sword; not by human might and strength, but by victorious love shown no where else as on Calvary's rugged mount; by "my Spirit saith the Lord of Hosts."

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* 1 Cor. 12. 3. † Ephes. 2. 15.

All the love of heaven, the love which sooner or later is to fill both earth and heaven, to bring about the reign of peace on earth and good will, universally, among men, is concentrated in and around the cross of Calvary. "Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us; and laid down his life for us."* Human language cannot depict this love, but the cross blazons it forth as nothing else can do, and a world redeemed, with the majesty and purity of the law neither tarnished nor lowered, will be its illustrious trophy through endless ages.

Thus we come back to the point from which we started: "When the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, is come, he will reprove the world of sin, because they believe not on me."

Under the dispensation of the Holy Ghost "the righteousness of the law" is fulfilled in Christ.—"What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin† condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit."‡ There is no weakening of the law in this; its claims are no less stringent and binding; there is no license given to vice and crime, but inasmuch as the law required perfect obedience, and man was unable to render it, Jesus in his own person "fulfilled all righteousness,"* beginning with his baptism in the Jordan, down to his death on the cross, "being made a curse for us," paying the penalty due to the violated law of God; paying our debt when we had nothing wherewith to discharge it, and so "redeeming us from the curse of the law:" for it is written "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."†

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* 1 John 4. 10. and also 3. 16.

† Marginal reading, "By a sacrifice for sin."

‡ Rom. 8. 3, 4.

The cross of Christ, the death and obedience of Christ, instead of weakening the sense of moral obligation, increase it a thousand fold by the penalty which God's most righteous law sternly exacted; by the suffering of death which Jesus underwent, and which was so loudly called for in order to magnify the law, and make it honorable, by the perfect fulfillment of all the requirements of God's holy law, both in the spirit and in the letter while in the flesh here on the earth among us.

Thus Jesus speaking of the coming of the Holy Ghost, whom he would send from heaven, says—When he is come he will reprove the world of righteousness, because "I go to the Father," which was contingent and dependent upon his death, and his ascension into heaven.

Lastly, the Holy Ghost, when he shall have come, will lift up the veil from the dark future, will chase away the heavy cloud which has so long obscured the horizon of time, and let in a celestial light by the assurance of the judgment of Satan, and the end of his reign as prince of this lower world. This had been shown to some extent in the book of prophecy, but Christ absolutely declares, that, under the dispensation of the Spirit, the Holy Ghost which the Father will send in his name, will "reprove the world of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged."*

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* Matt. 3. 15. † Gal. 3. 13. compared with Deut. 21. 23.

Here is light in obscurity. He who said to the mighty waves of the sea, So far shalt thou go, and no farther, will "put hooks into the jaws" "of leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent;"† a new day will dawn on our earth, and the millennial glory will begin. In anticipation of that great and glorious day (not that it had come yet), to be brought about through his sufferings and death, and "the power" of the Holy Ghost, with the preaching of the Word, and such other instrumentalities as God shall ordain, Jesus said to the seventy, who had returned from their first tour of love and labor with joy, because through the name of Christ the devils were subject unto them, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven;"‡ synonymous this, with, "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out."§

Here then was one of the topics of discourse, the promise of the Father, the gift of the Holy Ghost, with his additional illumination on the deep things of God, during the memorable forty days, while eating and drinking with his dear disciples, and the women ; more or less of this time spent perhaps in that upper room in Jerusalem, where they had eaten the last Paschal Supper, so longingly desired by Christ, and which had already been consecrated by his presence again and again after his resurrection from the dead.

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* John 16. 11. † Isa. 27. 1. and Ezek. 29. 4.

‡ Luke 10. 18. § John 12. 31.

Another topic which engaged the attention, and occupied the swiftly fleeting hours of Christ and his disciples in the brief interval between our Lord's resurrection and ascension into heaven, related to "the kingdom of God ;" the re-establishment of the throne of David, which God had said, "shall endure as the sun before me."*

To the very last moment the disciples were in doubt upon this point. Just before our Lord's ascension into heaven they said, " Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel."† He had in the past "turned again the captivity of Zion ;" the question now is, will the Lord do it yet again ? and will he do it now, "at this time." Will "the daughter of Zion" "the beauty of Israel," freeing herself from the Roman yoke, arise in her strength, take her place among the nations of the earth, "put on her beautiful garments," and become "a praise and glory in the earth ?" or is this great day, this jubilee of the world, so clearly foretold, so emphatically promised, so strongly pictured forth, in the most glowing colors, by a long line of prophets, to be deferred to a future time ? And possibly there was implied in this momentous question a strong desire to know when, if not "at this time," "their own Messiah's reign" would begin; when "imperial Salem, crowned with light,"* towering to the skies, would again assert its claim as of old, to be "the joy and beauty of the whole earth."

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* Ps. 89. 36. † Acts 1. 6.

To this implied if not direct inquiry, our Lord replies, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power."† It is enough for them to know that in God's own good time "the kingdom will be restored to Israel," and that what the angel Gabriel said to Mary when he announced to her the birth of a Son, "the desire of all nations," will receive an exact and literal accomplishment: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end."‡

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* Pope's Messiah. † Acts 1. 7. ‡ Luke 1. 32, 33.

CHAPTER IV.

THE INTERVIEW OF CHRIST WITH HIS DISCIPLES ON THE SHORE OF THE LAKE OF GALILEE, AFTER HIS RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD.

HOW glad we are to return to the shore of this loved lake once more; a lake rendered so dear, so sweet, so sacred, by unnumbered associations with the person and ministry of Jesus. It is a long while since we have been here; many months have passed away, and now we return to this sweet spot once more ere we leave it—lingeringly departing—slowly turning our steps in another direction, to return to it no more, till our Lord himself shall revisit our earth, and more than restore the verdant plain of Gennesareth to its former bloom, and almost changeless verdure.

It is sweet even in our dreams, when memory holds the reins, and we go back in nightly vision, to persons, and places, and fond remembrances, hid away in our own cloistered bosoms from all human knowledge, and which in those night scenes are brought back to us with a force and vividness—a play of fancy—which surpass even the reality in the far distant past, and we live over again the tenderness, the holy love, the angel dream which is gone forever. So it is to us most sweet to return to a spot which Jesus' feet have made to us so dear and holy, so soul entrancing; to scenes, associations, and persons endeared by their inseparable connection with the home of Jesus on the earth. And this return is made the more striking by the tragic scenes through which we have passed since we were last here, and which began first to be foretold in this more remote district of Judea, but when spoken fell unheeded on the deaf ear of those to whom they were so vainly addressed.

Ah me! when the "mighty angel" descended from heaven, broke the seal, and rolled away the great stone from the mouth of the sepulchre, and the night watch—all powerless—fell back on the ground as dead men, and Jesus came forth from the tomb resuming as his own right the life which he had voluntarily surrendered on the cross, the angel (or angels, it is immaterial) having performed his office, still lingered around the sacred spot, till the shadows of night began faintly and at first imperceptibly to mingle with the first doubtful gleams of returning day. As a sentinel on guard he still kept watch; his office not yet over; his mission not yet ended. When Mary came alone, unattended, or in company with other women (it is not of so much matter as to this, the main facts are what we want, slight discrepancies in the different narratives do not affect the essential statements), she saw the angel, and was at first affrighted by the glory of his presence, the luster that surrounded him; but she was soon reassured when the angel spake and said, "He is not here; for he is risen, as he said."* "But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you."

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* Matt. 28. 6. with Mark 16. 7.

Galilee, where the Gospel of the Son of God first took its rise, on account almost it would seem from its vicinity to the Gentiles, and where our Lord passed the greater part of his time during his ministry, and where he did most of his mighty works, where was his home during nearly the whole of his earthly life, and where he found most of his attached followers, and faithful disciples—Galilee was the place specially appointed for a general final reunion with those who had indeed taken up their cross, and followed him, after his resurrection, and previous to his ascension to heaven. Not, as we have seen, that he did not "shew himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs,"* at other times, and in other places, to one or more, as the case might be, as for instance to Simon Peter at one time, and to James the brother of John the beloved disciple, at another, as also to the women, and the eleven when assembled together, and the two disciples on their way to the village of Emmaus—but this was a gathering together, a general assemblage of the whole body of disciples then living, at one time, in one place, that all might take their last look at Christ, hear his last words, receive his parting benediction, and from their own personal knowledge be prepared to be the living witnesses of the great and life-imparting fact of his resurrection from the dead.

It is pleasing to note how, from the very first, Jesus, "the man Christ Jesus," spoke of his resurrection. After, on his visit to Jerusalem, he had purged the temple, and with a rod driven out the buyers and sellers, and those that sold doves, on the following day, the Jews having partially recovered from their astonishment at so strange a sight, and such an act of power, "Answered and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days will I raise it up."* The Jews standing around took this in a literal sense, as referring to the destruction of their temple, which since its demolition by Herod had been now forty and six years in building, and was not even then completed; for, if we recollect aright, there were at this very time thousands of men at work upon it. But Jesus spake of the temple of his body, in which as in a house made with hands "dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."† The disciples of our Lord did not at the time comprehend his meaning any more than the Jews: but after he was risen, and death and the grave had, however reluctantly, given up "the first fruits of them that sleep," then the Holy Spirit recalled these words to their remembrance; they understood their import, "and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said."‡

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* Acts 1. 3.

On two other occasions, while our Lord was in Galilee, when pressed by the Scribes and Pharisees to "shew them a sign from heaven," Jesus, to give expression to his sense of the obstinacy of their unbelief in the face of all his innumerable and wonderful works, said, almost in anger, A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign: and there shall no" (additional) "sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas;" (thereby attesting to this fact of the Old Testament scripture, whoever else might belie it either in scorn or ridicule) "for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."†

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* John 2. 18, 19. † Col. 2. 9. ‡ John 2. 22.

Thus much as to his rising again spoken of at intervals during his ministry. If Jesus had ever his eye fixed intently on Calvary's cross, so had he also on his triumphant resurrection on the third day from the grave. If his sun was to go down in darkness, soon would it rise again, never more to set.

As to the appointment in Galilee, that also was specially made before his death. On the very last night of his life, when he was telling his disciples beforehand what would so soon take place and how they all would leave him, fleeing as for their lives (though warm hearted, impetuous Peter thought he would not, though all the rest did), Jesus said, "But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee."† To this effect also spake "the young man, sitting on the right side of the sepulchre, clothed in a long white garment," to the women, who were filled with consternation at the sight of what appeared to be an apparition, "Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified; he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he

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* Matt. 12. 39, 40. with Matt. 16. 4. † Mark 14. 28.

goeth before you into Galilee: there ye shall see him, as he said unto you."*

It is impossible to fix the precise time, during the forty days, when the general re-union took place. We know that Jesus first appeared in Galilee to seven of them, in the early morning, as day was breaking, and objects as yet indistinctly seen, "at the sea of Tiberias." There were present on this occasion Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel of Cana of Galilee, John and James, "the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples."† Whether they came singly, by twos, or altogether, we know not; but they were here by special appointment. All the rest, with the women, had by this time returned from Jerusalem to Galilee, and were waiting, as we may conclude, for the coming of Christ. We need not ask how he came; his days of toil were over; it was no longer necessary for him wearied with his journey to rest sitting on Jacob's well; space and time were no more with Jesus; all places were now alike with him who "fills all space;" earth, air, and heaven. All the rest of the disciples and attached followers of our Lord, to the number of "above five hundred,"‡ were now gathered together, as we may suppose, in the vicinity of Capernaum, and by the sea shore, dwelling here temporarily, and in the ardor of expectation. It would seem as if they were all, or nearly all, Galileans. Was Nicodemus there? Joseph of Arimathea, was he there? also Lazarus and his sisters, had they come to Galilee in response to the call of their loved

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* Mark 16. 6, 7. † John 21. 2. ‡ 1 Cor. 15. 6.

Lord and Master? We can hardly think they were absent; but as a veil rests on these particulars, we will not attempt to lift it; but in a case like this Aristotle allows of reasonable conjectures and inferences in the narration of historical facts.

During this season of tarrying and pleasing suspense, one night Peter concluded to "go a-fishing;" returning for the nonce to his old calling; not, of course, after what had so lately transpired, with the view of following it ever again as a permanent employment. He did but wait the behest of his divine Lord and Master. Humbled as he was in the past, he was none the less loving than of old; but having learned at least in part to distrust himself, and not to rely too much on the feeling of the moment, he had become more cautious in his expressions of love and attachment to Jesus Christ. None know so well how to make allowances for the infirmities of our nature, even under the influence of divine grace, as Jesus "the friend of publicans and sinners."

The night—the season now verging toward summer—had passed away, and day was faintly breaking, as a stranger was dimly seen on the shore, and his voice heard, asking of their success. When told that they had taken nothing, he directed them to cast the net on the right side of the vessel; and immediately by that potent arm which had obtained so complete a victory over death and the grave, the net was filled with as many fish as it would hold. The denouement at once followed, and they knew that it was Jesus. They could not fail to recall a similar miracle, when under somewhat similar circumstances, on the same sea, in the early part of his ministry—Jesus had done the same thing, and signalized his power. That power was still the same; nay, by the victory over the grave, it was greater than before. When the disciples came to the shore, bringing their boats and net with them, wearied with the incessant toil of the night, chilled with exposure, and hungry, they were glad to find a fire already kindled, and fish, not taken from their net, laid on the live coals, with bread whereof to eat. Thus did Jesus first show himself to his disciples on the shore of Galilee's lake, in the early morning, with the fresh breeze blowing across the lake, from the opposite shore, ere the bustle of the day was begun, in a part somewhat remote, and when none were present but his own "chosen witnesses."

Soon after this, followed—perhaps in the course of the same day—the general re-union "of above five-hundred brethren" at one and the same time; most likely on some adjacent mountain, but remote, apart; so that there were none to intrude. They were girt about as by a belt of fire, like Moses on Mount Sinai, when shut up with the Lord for the space of forty days and forty nights. All these had known Jesus during his earthly life; by some means they had been notified of this meeting in Galilee, and the particular spot had been designated. With willing feet had they come to the appointed spot. All of them were trophies of his dying love; all had been won to his standard by his victorious arm. All, if not, nearly all, were present in Jerusalem at the time of his death on the cross, as it was the feast of the Passover. Some of the number, perhaps, had seen his body late in the day taken down from the cross, lingering as they did till dewy eve around the hallowed spot; they may have followed, and it is likely they did, to the grave, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, carefully, gently, with lowly reverence, carrying in their arms their sacred burden. The first day of the week soon came round; the Passover was still in progress; Jerusalem was still filled with people: strangers from abroad, and native Jews from every part of the land; when, borne on the wings of the wind, came the news—perhaps first generally published by the soldiers—that the body of Jesus had disappeared from the tomb, with the empty addition, that the disciples, who were afraid of their own shadow, had come by night, and in defiance of the guard, had stolen his body, and removed it where it could not be found. This was for general circulation; but these Galilean disciples who were yet in Jerusalem, attending the feast, heard what the women told, and knew of a truth that Jesus was indeed risen from the dead, and had been seen by those who knew him best, and loved him most. Of the meeting in Galilee, they would also be informed; perhaps both the place and the time, so that when Jesus came among them they were all at once gathered together in one place.

The number was large; but not so large but that during the period Jesus was with them, whether a longer or a shorter time, they could all satisfy themselves, as doubting Thomas did, of his personal identity; seeing the prints of the nails in his hands, and the hole in his side, made by the Roman sodier's spear; hearing his voice; listening to his words, and eating and drinking with him. Clear was the heaven above: soft and fresh the new springing grass; sweet the odor of flowers, even on the mountain top; while all nature was serene, and earth remained mute at the sound of her Maker's voice. One would like to know what passed, what was said; but nothing of the kind has been transmitted to us, and we must be content with the fact that many years after the date of this transaction, the greater part of these witnesses were still alive; were true to their allegiance to Christ, and always ready to testify as to what they had themselves seen and heard after Jesus arose from the dead. All these had seen many of his great works on the earth; they saw him after he rose from the dead; they were familiar with his person by long and frequent association, and after the lapse of many revolving years—most of them still among the living—they remained to testify from their own knowledge of the resurrection of Jesus. This great cloud of witnesses has long since passed away, lost in the dim mists of time past, but their testimony remains to cheer the heart, and confirm the faith of the lovers of Jesus down to this day.

BOOK TENTH.

CHAPTER I.

OF THE SAINTS THAT AROSE.

AMID the darkness that prevailed throughout the entire extent of the land of Judea, at the time that the Saviour of the world hung dying upon the cross, a darkness, perhaps, similar to that of Egyptian darkness, amid the quaking of the earth, rocking to and fro, like a ship at sea, the loud rendind of rocks torn asunder, as if by some powerful though an unseen agency, the graves of many saints, before securely closed, were now opened. As for the dead, though they still slept, and continued to sleep until after the resurrection of Jesus, yet the way was prepared for them to resume for a time their place among the living (coming as they did from Hades), to see and converse with those whom they had once well known in the flesh. Having put on their new bodies, that is "their house which is from heaven,"* they were ready to follow in the train of their Lord as he ascended to heaven, and be presented to an adoring heavenly world as a sheaf offering in time of harvest; as the first fruit offering of the harvest of the dead.

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* 2 Cor. 5. 2.

If the presence of Jesus, after his resurrection, was restricted to certain chosen witnesses, not so with these saints newly risen from their dusty beds. Of the death of these there could be no doubt; though they could not have been so long dead that their remembrance had faded away from those who knew and loved them well when they were alive. Their home had been in Jerusalem, "the holy city;" their friends were there still; wives, husbands, parents, children; there was the well known spot, the old home, the family circle, endeared by so many associations; the scenes of former days; and to these they returned, so lately torn from their loved embrace, and "appeared" unto them, not as spirits "unclothed," but as living men and women whom God had raised from the dead. They had died in the faith; their lives had been moulded after the pattern of the patriarchs and prophets; they belonged to the class of the Simeons and Annas; of Elizabeth and Zacharias; they were of those of whom it is said, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." Their memories were fragrant while their bodies were lying in the dust.

Of what they saw, or heard, or learned, in Hades nothing is said, they bring no tidings from the invisible world. To their dearest friends they reveal nothing of that world of glory and happiness (for to them as saints so it must have been) from whence they came; all is left shrouded in darkness as before; it was as if they had not come back, so far as additional light was shed upon "that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns." And yet quite a large number of the sainted dead "came out of their graves after the resurrection" of Christ; for we are told they "appeared to many." They revisited their several homes; they were seen and recognized by those nearest and dearest to them; for without this recognition—even as Jesus was recognized by his disciples—their rising from the dead would have availed nothing in confirmation of the resurrection of Christ Jesus the Lord, and as trophies of his victorious power, as the captain of our salvation over death and the grave.

To one in Christ rising from the dead, there is nothing startling; for unlike those shut up in darkness and the pit, their eyes have become accustomed to the light that outshines the sun; to the glories, at least in part, of Him who "dwelleth in light" inaccessible and unapproachable by mortal man; but to those who are yet in the flesh, friends, however dear in the past, the dead, appearing to them, as the angels to the women, suddenly and unexpectedly, must have given them a shock, perhaps terrified them at first, until, like the disciples, when they first saw through the gloom of night, and the misty storm, Jesus, walking on the upheaving wave, they heard the sound of a well known, and dearly loved voice, and saw features, and beheld an old familiar form, even that of Jesus. Then their fears vanished, their joy was great: and if we may venture to conjecture what passed between the living and the dead—the dead newly risen as Jesus had risen—we might suppose it to refer to the great event of the resurrection of Jesus. How long they remained, how often they "went into the holy city," walked its streets, entered its houses, conversed with its inmates, ate and drank with them, as Jesus did with his dear disciples, we know not, and we seek not to know; enough is revealed; and the fact of their reappearance from the grave to their friends in the holy city, Jerusalem, remains, which is more to the purpose than the gratification of our curiosity as to the land of shadows, darkness, and death. Like children at a play we have had glimpses of what is behind the dark, mysterious curtain, we have seen the dim outline of figures moving to and fro, their glittering sandalled feet passing back and forth below the curtain, and we can well wait a little till the curtain slowly rises, and presents us with the magnificent spectacle which it hides. What is time but a great theater in which we all play our parts! Happy he who plays his part well—who lives in obedience to the divine will. Born from above, renewed in the image of his Maker, knowing God as a man his cherished friend, he has but to doff the garment of mortality, and put on immortality, to stand in the presence of his Maker, and be initiated in those scenes which until now have been hidden from mortal gaze. Then the mysteries of eternity will be unfolded; we will no longer see through a glass darkly, but face to face, "knowing as we are known." O day of rapture. To stand at the fountain head beneath the throne of bliss; the source of life; to drink from the stream itself as it issues from the throne. Away, dark visions of time, has begun, and the mystery and the darkness are gone forever. Not to be disappointed like the boy who for the first time in his life sees behind the scenes, treads the stage which he so vainly imagined a garden of never fading flowers, and finds to his heart's sorrow how his imagination cheated him, and how delusive was his day-dream, and his childish enchantment. Not so when we go behind the curtain of time, throw it aside, and revel in that mystery of mysteries—God's love to human kind in his assumption of our nature, and lifting us up with himself through his cross to brighter realms, and the enjoyment of more beatific visions than the human mind in its highest aspirations, or holiest longings, could possibly ever have conceived of. Away, then, dark night of time! Jesus has disrobed death of its darkest gloom. Death it is true still sways his leaden sceptre, but soon it will drop from his nerveless hand, and death and the grave be no more—even as things forgotten; as a stream that has passed away.

CHAPTER II.

THE GREAT COMMISSION.

AFTER a whole night spent in silent solitary prayer, in the early morning, the dew yet spangling the grass, the air fresh and reviving, and perhaps not long after the first visit to Jerusalem, when Jesus in purging the temple made such a display of his mighty power, and the people even then were ready to acknowledge him as their rightful King, our Lord prepared to make choice of his twelve disciples. A small group we see gathered around Jesus on a mountain not far from Capernaum; for the most part unlettered men, as the phrase at that time went. There was not a scribe among them; one learned in the law of Moses; that is, after the manner of the schools in Jerusalem, and according to the teaching and doctrine of the most famous masters in Israel. Indeed the law itself, in its pure, unadulterated form, was nearly lost sight of, or else perverted by their traditions; the commandments of men taking the place of, and nearly obliterating, the Word of God. The fountain was muddy and defiled at its source. Not then from the schools of the Rabbis, with their thousands of scholars, with their quibs and their fooleries, like the scholastics and rhetoricians of Greece, were the twelve taken; but from a humbler walk in life: not even from the city of the great King, where were to be found those that sat (that is, in their own conceit) in Moses' seat, but from Galilee held in slight esteem as a source and center of light by these teachers in Israel. Not a step did Jesus take to conciliate this class of men; neither did John the Baptist, his forerunner. Nay, they came in direct antagonism with them; with their spirit, their teaching, their pride, their exclusiveness, their self aggrandizement, their love of popular applause, and avoidance of whatever would weaken their hold upon the people, or turn the tide or change the favoring breeze. Not from the favored and self-appreciative classes were drawn the Apostles of the "meek and lowly" Jesus.

On the mountain side, in the early morning, in full view of the Sea of Galilee, lying placid at their feet, its surface just ruffled by the fresh breeze of morning, Jesus chose those "whom he would;"* twelve from among his other disciples and followers, "whom also he named Apostles."† They formed almost a family band from the first by early association and relationship. There were Andrew and Peter, James and John, joined in partnership as fishermen, by no means poor or in indigent circumstances, but following fishing for a livelihood. There were also James and Judas, or Jude,‡ brothers, the children of the sister of the mother of our Lord. Then there was Philip of Bethsaida—the village or town adjoining Capernaum—with Nathaniel (Bartholomew), a friend of Philip, a brother in love at least, of Cana of Galilee, the place of the marriage to which "the mother of Jesus" was invited in consequence perhaps of family ties, more or less near or distant. Then came Matthew, or Levi, the publican, who was also a resident of Capernaum, and if not related to any of the rest, well acquainted with most, if not all of the disciples, before they embarked in a common cause. The other three, Thomas, Simon Zelotes, and Judas Iscariot, were also of Galilee, though we cannot trace so well the connection between them and the rest. Several of them we know had been the disciples of John the Baptist, and perhaps all had enlisted under the banner of the cross first through the leadership of John; that broke, or prepared the way for what followed. How intimate then was the connection, how close the tie, which united and endeared them to each other. With one solitary, sad exception, these all continued with Jesus in his "temptations," and were his chosen witnesses after his ascension into heaven. In regard to this one, the last night of his suffering life, Jesus said—as the gloom deepened around, and the night grew dark and chilly, and "the sentinel stars set their watch in the sky"—"I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen; but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me."*

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* Mark 3. 13. † Luke 6. 13.

‡ Called also Lebbeus. Matt. 10. 3.

But now as in the past, Elisha was about to lose Elijah, carried up to heaven as in a chariot of fire, so the disciples were about to lose the personal presence of their Lord and Master; his last hour with them was nearly come; soon he would be removed out of their sight; a veil, however thin, and indeed almost transparent, would hide him for a time from their eyes, but before his departure he gives them their commission to preach the Gospel, and promises to endow them with supernatural gifts: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."*

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* John 13. 18, 19. with Psa. 41. 9.

This commission was given on the same mountain where the twelve were chosen by Christ in the first place, and denominated Apostles. It was also the consecrated spot in Galilee, a favorite and often visited mountain, where he had appointed to meet them after his resurrection from the dead.† This was also the place, in all probability, of the gathering of the five hundred disciples; for of some of these it must have been spoken, and not of the eleven (their doubts having been completely removed before leaving Jerusalem for Galilee) that "some"—that is, of the five hundred—"doubted;" though the greater number, "when they saw him, worshipped him."‡ It was in this self-same hour the supreme Godhead of Jesus shone forth with resplendent luster, when suddenly he appeared in their midst, drôpping as if from the skies, clothed in majesty divine, and holding in his hand not the rod with which he drove of yore the buyers and sellers from the temple, but the sceptre of universal empire, "and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."* There is no mention of derived power; Jesus is absolute, supreme; he is truly, though he was crucified, and did hang on a tree, not only Christ, but "both Lord" (i. e. Jehovah) "and Christ,"† as Peter said on the day of Pentecost.

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* Mark 16. 15. with Matt. 28. 20. † Matt. 28. 16.

‡ Matt. 28. 17.

Under a garb so majestic, clothed with power so absolute, reigning in his own right, as a monarch "whose sway none can dispute," for a moment the majesty of heaven on earth, the throne of God, "the mighty ruler of the universe," set upon a high mountain in upper Galilee, Jesus gives his great commission to the eleven; he places the whole world before them as their proper field of action; he breaks down every barrier between Jew and Gentile; he "makes bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations," and declares, in advance of what even yet has not come to pass, after the lapse of nearly two thousand years, that "all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God."‡ Besides he promises his presence, though absent in the body, as long as time shall last, and the world in its present form shall endure, as sustaining, cheering, and helping his disciples in their great and important work. What adds to the charm of the commission, and gives it an undying interest in our eyes even to this day, is that the disciples received it from Jesus "the Lord of earth and skies," at a time when the cause to the unbelieving Jews was nearly if not quite lost, and when humanly speaking there was no chance of its revival; much less that it should supersede the old Jewish ritual; much less that these grand, and soul-inspiring words should be literally fulfilled through the disciples in connection with the great commission given by Jesus on this most eventful day: "And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people."* The tidal wave that erst left Judea's sea-beaten shore shall return thither again, in its refluent course, and, rising mountain high, shall fill and overflow the land; nay, it shall fill all lands, covering the earth as the waters cover the great deep, with the glory of the Lord of Hosts.

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* Matt. 28. 18. † Acts 2. 36. ‡ Isa. 52. 10.

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* Isa. 51. 16.

CHAPTER III.

THE ASCENSION.

WE have little else to write at present. We must reserve, on account of the length which this volume has reached, the fulfillment of "the promise of the Father," the wonderful narrative to which it gave rise, and all the inconceivable results which flow therefrom.

All that we have thus far written, is but preparatory to this; to the topics which it necessarily involves; especially that of "the restitution of all things," which is indeed the grand theme of prophecy; that of all the holy prophets, without one exception, from the beginning of the world. This is the splendid structure, the creation of "a new heavens and a new earth," the universal reign of Christ, the subjugation of all things to his will and word in the heavens above and the earth beneath, with the redemption of the groaning earth (whereof the foundation merely is laid in his sufferings and death) his resurrection and most glorious ascension into heaven in order to sit down on the throne of the majesty on high, What may we not look for, if not just now, in the nearer or more distant future (as the case may be), from such an exhibition as the assumption of our nature by the "great and dreadful God," his tabernacling among us in the flesh for a certain number of years as one "that serveth," not as ruler and master; and lastly dying on the cross. Surely all conceivable good must sooner or later flow from such an exhibition of divine love. This must be reserved for the next volume, as it will require a wider scope than could be contained in the present, even if much more extended than it now is. We trust time and opportunity will be allowed us for the execution of this work, which indeed will be but the Sequel to this.

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There was to be a last farewell parting interview. The last trace of the print of the footsteps of Jesus upon our earth were to leave their impress on Olivet's top, a favorite place of resort during his life time for Jesus and his disciples; his closing words were heard on this holy mount. Hidden by a hovering cloud he soon disappeared from their gazing sight, that face now shining with celestial light; his garments white and glistering, as slowly he rose upward, ascending to the heavens above. The last tear drop had fallen from those weeping eyes; the last sigh had issued from that heaving bosom, assured pledge that Jesus, the Saviour of the world, would erelong wipe away tears from off all faces, banish sorrow from every beating, sorrowful bosom, and ultimately restore our sad and stricken earth to more than "Eden's first bloom," when, according to the word of the angels to the disciples, "This same Jesus,* which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Then returned they to the city, rejoicing at what they had seen, full of hope, all their fears gone, and prepared for greater manifestations of the divine power and glory. They were not afraid to be found in the streets of Jerusalem, in the market places, and in the temple. At the same time they continued daily to assemble in an upper room, for prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, with his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas, waiting for the descent of the Holy Ghost, the promised Comforter, the Spirit of truth, under whose auspices would be inaugurated the beginning of the regeneration of our world, to be completed by the second coming of Christ Jesus the Lord to judge the world, to put an end to sin, and to bring in everlasting righteousness.

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* Acts 1. 11.

FINIS.

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